1.24.22.

LIBRARY OF THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PRINCETON, N. J.

PRESENTED BY

Mrs. William Swan.

Division SCC

Section 10,644

v. 1

David L. Perry

L. P.

G. Kneller Eq. pinx.
G. Van.dr Gucht Scul.
His Grace IOHN
Lord Arch Bishop of
CANTERBURY
Ætat. 64.
Año. 1694.

THE

WORKS

Of the Most Reverend

Dr. JOHN TILLOTSON,

Lord Archbishop of Canterbury.

IN TWELVE VOLUMES.

CONTAINING

Two Hundred and Fifty Four SERMONS and DISCOURSES on Several Occasions:

Together with the RULE of FAITH;
PRAYERS Composed by him for his own Use;
A DISCOURSE to his Servants before the SACRAMENT;
And a FORM of PRAYER, Composed by him, for the Use of King *William*.

LONDON:

Printed for R. Ware, A. Ward, J. *and* P. Knapton, T. Longman, R. Hett, C. Hitch, J. Hodges, S. Austen, J. *and* R. Tonson, J. *and* H. Pemberton, *and* J. Rivington. MDCCXLIII.

SERMONS

ON SEVERAL

SUBJECTS *and* OCCASIONS,

By the moſt Reverend

Dr. *JOHN TILLOTSON*,

LATE

Lord Archbiſhop of *Canterbury*.

VOLUME *the* FIRST.

LONDON:

Printed for *R. Ware*, *A. Ward*, *J.* and *P. Knapton*, *T. Longman*, *R. Hett*, *C. Hitch*, *S. Auſten*, *J.* and *R. Tonſon*, *J. Wood*, *J.* and *H. Pemberton*, and *J. Rivington*.

M DCC XLII.

To the Worſhipful

The MASTERS *of the* BENCH,

And the Reſt of the

MEMBERS

OF THE

Honourable Society of *Lincolns-Inn.*

GENTLEMEN,

WHEN I reſolved to publiſh theſe ſermons, there could be no diſpute to whom I ſhould dedicate them. They do of right belong to you, being moſt of them firſt preach'd among you; beſides my great obligation to you for your conſtant reſpects to me, both in the favourable acceptance, and in the generous encouragement of my labours, ever ſince I had the honour and happineſs to be related

I.

to you. In a thankful acknowledgment whereof I humbly preſent this ſmall part of them to you, hoping that by the bleſſing of GOD they may be of ſome uſe for the promoting of true piety and virtue, which is the ſincere wiſh and aim of

Your moſt obliged

and faithful ſervant,

JOHN TILLOTSON.

THE

PREFACE.

I *Shall neither trouble the* reader, *nor my ſelf, with any apology for the publiſhing of theſe* ſermons. *For if they be in any meaſure truly ſerviceable to the end for which they are deſign'd, to eſtabliſh men in the principles of religion, and to recommend to them the practice of it with any conſiderable advantage, I do not ſee what apology is neceſſary; and if they be not ſo, I am ſure none can be ſufficient. However, if there need any, the common heads of excuſe in theſe caſes are very well known; and I hope I have an equal right to them with other men.*

I ſhall chooſe rather in this preface, *to give a ſhort account of the following* diſcourſes, *and as briefly as I can to vindicate a ſingle* paſſage *in the* firſt *of them from the exceptions of a* gentleman *who hath been pleaſed to honour it ſo far as to write a whole book againſt it.*

The deſign of theſe diſcourſes *is fourfold.*

Firſt, *To ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of* atheiſm, *and of* ſcoffing at religion; *which I am ſorry is ſo neceſſary to be done in this age. This I have endeavoured in the* two firſt *of theſe* diſcourſes.

Secondly, *To recommend religion to men from the great and manifold* advantages *which it brings both to* publick ſociety *and to* particular perſons. *And this is the argument of the* third *and* fourth.

Thirdly, *To represent the* excellency, *more particularly of the* christian religion; *and* to vindicate the practice of it *from the suspicion of those* grievous troubles and difficulties *which many imagine it to be attended withal. And this is the subject of the* fifth *and* sixth.

Fourthly, *To persuade men to the practice of this holy religion, from the* great obligation which the profession of christianity *lays upon men to that purpose; and more particularly, from the glorious rewards of another life; which is the design of the* two next discourses.

Having given this short account of the following discourses, *I crave leave of the* reader *to detain him a little longer, whilst I vindicate a* passage *in the first of these* sermons, *from the assaults of a whole* book *purposely writ against it. The* title *of the* book *is* faith vindicated from the possibility of falshood. *The author Mr.* J. S. *the famous* author *of* sure-footing. *He hath indeed in this last book of his, to my great amazement, quitted that glorious* title. *Not that I dare assume to my self to have put him out of conceit with it, by having convinc'd him of the fantasticalness of it: no; I despair to convince that man of any thing, who after so fair an admonition does still persist to maintain,* * *that* first and self-evident principles, *not only may, but are fit to be demonstrated; and* † *that those ridiculous identical propositions, that* faith is faith, *and a* rule is a rule, *are* first principles *in this controversy of* the rule of faith, *without which nothing* can be solidly concluded either about rule or faith. *But there was another reason for his quitting of that*

* *Letter of thanks*, p 24, &c. † Ibid p 11.

title

title, *and a prudent one indeed: he had forſaken the defence of* ſure-footing, *and then it became convenient to lay aſide that* title, *for fear of putting people any more in mind of that book.*

I expected indeed after his letter of thanks, *in which he * tells us, he* intended to throw aſide the rubbiſh of my book, that in his anſwer he might the better lay open the fabrick of my diſcourſe, and have nothing there to do, but to ſpeak to ſolid points; *I ſay, after this, I expected a full anſwer to* the ſolid points (*as he is pleaſed to call them*) *of my book; and that, (according to his excellent method of* removing the rubbiſh, *in order to the pulling down of a building) the* fabrick *of my book would long ſince have been demoliſh'd and laid even with the ground. But eſpecially, when in the concluſion of that moſt civil and obliging letter, he threaten'd* never to leave following on his blow, till he had either brought Dr. *Still.* and me to lay principles that wou'd bear the teſt, or it was made evident to all the world that we had none: *I began (as I had reaſon) to be in a terrible fear of him, and to look upon myſelf as a dead man. And indeed who can think himſelf ſo conſiderable as not to dread this mighty man of* demonſtration, *this prince of* controvertiſts, *this great lord and profeſſor of* firſt principles? *But I perceive that great minds are merciful, and do ſometimes content themſelves to threaten when they could deſtroy.*

For inſtead of returning a full anſwer to my book, he (according to their new mode *of confuting books) manfully falls a nibbling at one ſingle* paſſage *in it,* pag. 118. *wherein he makes me to ſay (for I ſay no*

* Ibid p 14.

ſuch

such thing) that the rule of christian faith, and consequently faith itself, is possible to be false: *nay in his* letter of thanks, † *he says* it is an avow'd position, *in that place*, that faith is possible to be false. *And to give the more countenance to this calumny, he chargeth the same* position (in equivalent terms) of the possible falshood of faith, and that as to the chiefest and most fundamental point, the tenet of a deity, *upon the forementioned* sermon. *But because he knew in his conscience, that I had* avow'd *no such* position, *he durst not cite the words either of my* book *or* sermon, *lest the reader should have discover'd the notorious falshood and groundlesness of this calumny: nay, he durst not so much as refer to any particular place in my sermon, where such a* passage *might be found. And yet this is the man that has the face to charge others with false citations; to which charge, before I have done, I shall say something, which (what effect soever it may have upon him) would make any other man sufficiently asham'd.*

But yet I must acknowledge, that in this position *which he fastens upon me, he honours me with excellent company, my Lord* Falkland, *Mr.* Chillingworth, *and Dr.* Stillingfleet; *persons of that admirable strength and clearness in their* writings, *that Mr.* S. *when he reflects upon his own style and way of reasoning, may blush to acknowledge that ever he has read them. And as to this* position *which he charges them withal, I do not know (nor have the least reason upon Mr.* S*'s word to believe) any such thing is maintained by them.*

As for my self, whom I am now only concern'd to

† Ibid. p. 13.

vin-

vindicate, I ſhall ſet down the two Paſſages, *to which I ſuppoſe he refers.*

In my ſermon, *I endeavour (among other things) to ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of* atheiſm *upon this account:* becauſe it requires more evidence for things than they are capable of. *To make this good, I diſcourſe thus: Ariſtotle* hath long ſince obſerved, how unreaſonable it is to expect the ſame kind of proof for every thing, which we have for ſome things. Mathematical things being of an abſtracted nature, are only capable of clear demonſtration. But concluſions in natural philoſophy are to be prov'd by a ſufficient induction of experiments; things of a moral nature by moral arguments, and matters of fact by credible teſtimony. And though none of theſe be ſtrict demonſtration, yet have we an undoubted aſſurance of them, when they are prov'd by the beſt arguments that the nature and quality of the thing will bear. None can demonſtrate to me, that there is ſuch an iſland in *America* as *Jamaica*; yet upon the teſtimony of credible perſons, and authors who have written of it, I am as free from all doubt concerning it, as from doubting of the cleareſt mathematical demonſtration. So that this is to be entertained as a firm principle, by all thoſe who pretend to be certain of any thing at all, that when any thing is prov'd by as good arguments as that thing is capable of, and we have as great aſſurance that it is, as we could poſſibly have ſuppoſing it were, we ought not in reaſon to make any doubt of the exiſtence of that thing. Now to apply this to the preſent caſe. The being of a GOD is not mathematically demonſtrable, nor can it be expected it ſhould; becauſe only mathematical matters admit of this

this kind of evidence. Nor can it be prov'd immediately by ſenſe, becauſe GOD being ſuppos'd to be a pure ſpirit, cannot be the object of any corporeal ſenſe. But yet we have as great aſſurance that there is a GOD, as the nature of the thing to be prov'd is capable of, and as we could in reaſon expect to have, ſuppoſing that he were.

Upon this paſſage it muſt be (if any thing in the ſermon) *that Mr.* S. *chargeth this* poſition (in equivalent terms) of the poſſible falſhood of faith, and that as to the chiefeſt and moſt fundamental point, the tenet of a deity. *And now I appeal to the reader's eyes and judgment, whether the ſum of what I have ſaid, be not this, that though the exiſtence of* GOD *be not capable of that ſtrict kind of demonſtration which mathematical matters are, yet that we have an undoubted aſſurance of it. One would think that no man could be ſo ridiculous as from hence to infer, that I believe it poſſible, notwithſtanding this aſſurance, that there ſhould be no* GOD. *For however in many other caſes an undoubted aſſurance that a thing is, may not exclude all ſuſpicion of a poſſibility of its being otherwiſe; yet in this* tenet of a deity *it moſt certainly does. Becauſe whoever is aſſur'd that there is a* GOD, *is aſſur'd there is a being whoſe exiſtence is and always was neceſſary, and conſequently is aſſured that it is impoſſible he ſhould not be, and involves in it a contradiction. So that my diſcourſe is ſo far from being* equivalent *to the* poſition *he mentions, that it is a perfect contradiction to it. And he might with as much truth have affirm'd, that I had expreſly and in ſo many words ſaid that there is no* GOD.

The other paſſage is in pag. 118. *of my* book, *concerning* the rule of faith. *I was diſcourſing that no*

man

man can ſhew by any neceſſary argument, that it is naturally impoſſible that all the relations concerning *America* ſhould be falſe. *But* yet *(ſay I)* I ſuppoſe, that notwithſtanding this, no man in his wits is now poſſeſt with ſo incredible a folly, as to doubt whether there be ſuch a place. The caſe is the very ſame as to the certainty of an ancient book, and of the ſenſe of plain expreſſions: we have no demonſtration for theſe things, and we expect none; becauſe we know the things are not capable of it. We are not infallibly certain, that any book is ſo ancient as it pretends to be; or that it was written by him whoſe name it bears; or that this is the ſenſe of ſuch and ſuch paſſages in it; it is poſſible all this may be otherwiſe: but we are very well aſſur'd that it is not, nor hath any prudent man any juſt cauſe to make the leaſt doubt of it: for a bare poſſibility that a thing may be, or not be, is no juſt cauſe of doubting whether a thing be or not. It is poſſible all the people in *France* may die this night, but I hope the poſſibility of this doth not incline any man in the leaſt to think that it will be ſo. It is poſſible that the ſun may not riſe to morrow morning; yet for all this I ſuppoſe that no man hath the leaſt doubt but that it will.

To avoid the cavils of this impertinent man, I have tranſcrib'd the whole page *to which he refers. And now where is this* avow'd poſition of the poſſible falſhood of faith? *All that I ſay is this, that we are not* infallible *either in judging of the antiquity of a book, or of the ſenſe of it; by which I mean (as any man of ſenſe and ingenuity would eaſily perceive I do) that we cannot demonſtrate theſe things ſo, as to ſhew that the contrary neceſſarily involves a contradiction;*

but yet that we may have a firm assurance concerning these matters, so as not to make the least doubt of them.

And is this to avow the possible falshood of faith? *and yet this* position *Mr.* S. *charges upon these words; how justly I shall now examine.*

Either by faith *Mr.* S. *means the* doctrine *reveal'd by* GOD, *and then the meaning of the* position *must be,* that what GOD says, is possible to be false; *which is so absurd a* position *as can hardly enter into any man's mind; and yet Mr.* S. *hath the modesty all along in his* book *to insinuate that in the forecited* passage *I say as much as this comes to.*

Or else Mr. S. *means by* faith, *the* assent *which we give to doctrines as reveal'd by* GOD; *and then his sense of infallibility must be either, that whoever assents to any thing as reveal'd by* GOD, *cannot be deceiv'd, upon supposition that it is so reveal'd; or else absolutely, that whoever assents to any thing as reveal'd by* GOD, *cannot be deceiv'd. Now although I do not, in the* passage *forecited, speak one syllable concerning doctrines reveal'd by* GOD, *yet I affirm* (*and so will any man else*) *that an assent to any doctrine as reveal'd by* GOD, *if it be reveal'd by him, is impossible to be false. But this is only an infallibility* upon suppositon, *which amounts to no more than this,* that if a thing be true, it is impossible to be false. *And yet the principal design of Mr.* S's book *is to prove this, which I believe no man in the world was ever so senseless as to deny. But if he mean* absolutely, *that whoever assents to any doctrine as reveal'd by* GOD, *cannot be deceiv'd, that is, that no man can be mistaken about matters of faith* (*as he must mean, if he pretend to have any adversary, and do not fight only with his own shadow*) *this*

this I confeſs is a very comfortable aſſertion, but I am much afraid it is not true.

Or elſe, laſtly, by faith *he underſtands the* means *and* motives *of faith. And then the plain ſtate of the controverſy between us is this,* whether it be neceſſary to a chriſtian belief to be infallibly ſecur'd of the means whereby the chriſtian doctrine is convey'd to us, and of the firmneſs of the motives upon which our belief of it is grounded. *This indeed is ſomething to the purpoſe; for though in the* paſſage *before-cited I ſay not one word concerning the motives of our belief of the chriſtian doctrine, yet my diſcourſe there was intended to be apply'd to the* means *whereby the knowledge of this doctrine is convey'd to us. However, I am contented to join iſſue with Mr.* S. *upon both theſe points.*

1. *That it is not neceſſary to the true nature of* faith, *that the* motives *upon which any man believes the chriſtian doctrine ſhould be abſolutely concluſive, and impoſſible to be falſe. That it is neceſſary, Mr.* S. *ſeveral times affirms in his* book; *but how unreaſonably appears from certain and daily experience. Very many chriſtians (ſuch as St.* Auſtin *ſpeaks of,* as are ſav'd not by the quickneſs of their underſtandings, but the ſimplicity of their belief) *do believe the chriſtian doctrine upon incompetent grounds, and their belief is true, though the argument upon which they ground it be not* (*as Mr.* S. ſays) abſolutely concluſive of the thing: *and he that thus believes the chriſtian doctrine, if he adhere to it, and live accordingly, ſhall undoubtedly be ſav'd; and yet I hope Mr.* S. *will not ſay that any man ſhall be ſaved without true faith. I might add, that in this* aſſertion *Mr.* S. *is plainly contradicted by thoſe of his own church.*

For they generally grant that *general councils*, though they be infallible in their *definitions* and *concluſions*, yet are not always ſo in their *arguments* and reaſonings about them. And the *guide* of controverſies * *expreſly ſays*, that it is not neceſſary that a divine faith ſhould always have an external rationally infallible ground or motive thereto (whether church-authority, or any other) on his part, that ſo believes. *Here is a man of their own church* avowing *this* poſition, that faith is poſſible to be falſe. *I deſire Mr.* S. *who is the very rule of controverſy, to do juſtice upon this falſe* guide.

I muſt acknowledge that Mr. S. *attempts to prove this* aſſertion, *and that by a very pleaſant and ſurpriſing argument, which is this.* The profound myſteries of faith *(he tells us* †*)* muſt needs ſeem to ſome, (*viz.* thoſe who have no light but their pure natural reaſon, ‖ *as he ſaid before)* impoſſible to be true; which therefore nothing but a motive of its own nature ſeemingly impoſſible to be falſe can conquer ſo as to make them conceit them really true. *What Mr.* S. *here means by a motive* of its own nature ſeeming *impoſſible to be falſe, I cannot divine, unleſs he means a* real ſeeming *impoſſibility. But be that as it will; does Mr.* S. *in good earneſt believe that a* motive of its own nature ſeeming impoſſible to be falſe, *is ſufficient to convince any man, that has and uſes* the light of natural reaſon, *of the truth of a thing* which muſt needs ſeem to him impoſſible to be true? *In my opinion theſe two ſeeming impoſſibilities are ſo equally matched, that it muſt needs be a drawn battle between them. Suppoſe the thing to be believed be* tranſubſtantiation;

* Ibid. p. 35. † *Faith vind* p. 90. ‖ P. 89.

this

this indeed is a very profound *mystery, and is (to speak in Mr.* S*'s phrase)* of its own nature so seemingly impossible, *that I know no* argument *in the world strong enough to cope with it. And I challenge Mr.* S. *to instance in any* motive of faith *which is, both to our understanding and our senses, more plainly impossible to be false than their doctrine of* transubstantiation *is evidently impossible to be true. And if he cannot, how can he reasonably expect that any man in the world should believe it?*

2. *That it is not necessary to the true nature of* faith, *that we should be infallibly secur'd of the means whereby the christian doctrine is convey'd to us; particularly of the antiquity and authority of the books of scripture, and that the expressions in it cannot possibly bear any other sense. And these are the very things I instance in, in the* passage *so often mention'd. And to these Mr.* S. *ought to have spoken, if he intended to have confuted that* passage. *But he was resolv'd not to speak distinctly, knowing his best play to be in the dark, and that all his safety lay in the confusion and obscurity of his talk.*

Now that to have an infallible security in these particulars *is not necessary to the true nature of faith is evident upon these two accounts; because faith may be without this infallible security, and because in the particulars mention'd it is impossible to be had.*

1. *Because faith may be without this infallible security. He that is so assur'd of the antiquity and authority of the books of scripture, and of the sense of those texts wherein the doctrines of christianity are plainly delivered, as to see no just cause to doubt thereof, may really assent to those doctrines though he have no infallible security. And an assent so grounded I affirm to have*

the

the true nature of faith. For what degree of assent, *and what security of the* means, *which convey to us the knowledge of christianity, are necessary to the true nature of faith, is to be estimated from the end of faith, which is the salvation of mens souls. And whoever is so assur'd of the* authority *and* sense *of scripture, as to believe the doctrine of it, and to live accordingly, shall be saved. And surely such a belief as will save a man hath the true nature of faith, though it be not infallible. And if* GOD *have sufficiently provided for the salvation of men of all capacities, it is no such reflexion upon* the goodness and wisdom of providence, *as Mr.* S. *imagines, that he hath not taken care that every man's faith should arrive to the degree of infallibility; nor does our blessed* SAVIOUR, *for not having made this provision, deserve* to be esteemed by all the world not a wise lawgiver, but a mere ignoramus and impostor, *as * one of his* fellow controvertists *speaks with reverence.*

Besides, this assertion that infallibility is necessary to the true nature of that assent which we call faith, *is plainly false upon another account also; because faith admits of degrees. But infallibility has none. The scripture speaks of a weak and a strong faith, and of the increase of faith; but I never heard of a weak and strong infallibility. Infallibility is the highest perfection of the knowing faculty, and consequently the firmest degree of assent upon the firmest grounds, and which are known to be so. But will Mr.* S. *say, that the highest degree of assent admits of degrees, and is capable of increase? Infallibility is an absolute impossibility of being deceived; now I desire Mr.* S. *to shew me the degrees of absolute impossibility; and if he could do that, and consequently*

* *Labyrinthus Cantuarienſis*, p. 77.

there

there might be degrees of infallibility, yet I cannot believe that Mr. S. *would think fit to call any degrees of infallibility a* weak faith *or assent.*

2. *Because an infallible security, in the particular mention'd, is impossible to be had; I mean in an ordinary way, and without miracle and particular revelation; because the nature of the thing is incapable of it. The utmost security we have of the antiquity of any book is humane testimony, and all humane testimony is fallible for this plain reason, because all men are fallible. And though Mr.* S. *in defence of his beloved tradition is pleas'd to say that humane testimony in some cases is infallible, yet I think no man before him was ever so hardy as to maintain that the testimony of fallible men is infallible. I grant it to be in many cases certain; that is, such as a considerate man may prudently rely and proceed upon, and hath no just cause to doubt of; and such as none but an obstinate man or a fool can deny. And that thus the learned men of his own church define* certainty, *Mr.* S. (*if he would but vouchsafe to read such books*) *might have learnt from* * Melchior Canus, *who speaking of the firmness of humane testimony in some cases* (*which yet he did not believe to be infallible*) *defines it thus,* those things are certain among men, which cannot be deny'd without obstinacy and folly. *I know Mr.* S. *is pleas'd to say, that* certainty *and* infallibility *are all one. And he is the first man that I know of that ever said it. And yet perhaps some body may have been before him in it, for I remember* Tully *says,* that there is nothing so foolish but some philosopher or other has said it. *I am sure Mr.* S's *own* philosopher *Mr.* Wh. *contradicts*

* De loc. theol. lib. 11. c. 4. Certa apud homines ea sunt, quæ negari sine pervicacia, & stultitia, non possunt.

him

him in this most clearly, in his preface *to* Rushworth's dialogues; *where explicating the term* moral certainty *he tells us, that* some understood by it such a certainty as makes the cause always work the same effect, though it take not away the absolute possibility of working other ways; *and this presently after he tells us,* ought absolutely to be reckon'd in the degree of true certainty, and the authors consider'd as mistaken in undervaluing it. *So that, according to Mr.* White, *true certainty may consist with a possibility of the contrary, and consequently Mr.* S. *is mistaken in thinking certainty and infallibility to be all one. Nay I do not find any two of them agreeing among themselves, about the notions of infallibility and certainty. Mr.* White *says, that what some call* moral certainty, *is true certainty, though it do not take away a possibility of the contrary. Mr.* S. *asserts the direct contrary, that moral certainty is only probability, because it does not take away the possibility of the contrary. The* guide in controversies * *differs from them both, and makes* moral, certain *and* infallible *all one. I desire that they would agree these matters among themselves before they quarrel with us about them.*

In brief then, though moral certainty *be sometimes taken for a high degree of probability which can only produce a doubtful assent; yet it is also frequently us'd for a firm and undoubted assent to a thing upon such grounds as are fit fully to satisfy a prudent man; and in this sense I have always us'd this* term. *But now* infallibility *is an absolute security of the understanding from all possibility of mistake in what it believes. And there are but two ways for the understanding to be thus secur'd; either by the perfection of its own nature, or*

* Pag. 135.

by

by ſupernatural aſſiſtance. But no humane underſtanding being abſolutely ſecur'd from poſſibility of miſtake by the perfection of its own nature (which I think all mankind except Mr. S. *have hitherto granted) it follows, that no man can be infallible in any thing, but by ſupernatural aſſiſtance. Nor did ever the church of* Rome *pretend to infallibility upon any other account, as every one knows that hath been converſant in the writings of their learned men. And Mr.* Creſſy *in his* * *anſwer to Dr.* Pierce *hath not the face to contend for any other infallibility but this, that* the immutable GOD can actually preſerve a mutable creature from actual mutation: *but I can by no means agree with him in what immediately follows, concerning the* omniſcience *of a creature; that* GOD, who is abſolutely omniſcient, can teach a rational creature all truths neceſſary or expedient to be known; ſo that though a man may have much ignorance, yet he may be in a ſort omniſcient within a determinate ſphere. Omniſcient within a determinate ſphere, *is an infinite within a finite ſphere; and is not that a very pretty ſort of knowing all things, which may conſiſt with an ignorance of many things? Of all the* controvertiſts *I have met with (except Mr.* S.) *Mr.* Creſſy *is the happieſt at theſe ſmart and ingenious kind of reaſonings.*

As to the other particular *of the ſenſe of books, it is likewiſe plainly impoſſible that any thing ſhould be deliver'd in ſuch clear and certain words as are abſolutely incapable of any other ſenſe; and yet notwithſtanding this, the meaning of them may be ſo plain as that any unprejudic'd and reaſonable man may certainly underſtand them. How many* definitions *and* axioms, *&c. are there in* Euclid, *in the ſenſe of which men are univer-*

* P. 88, 89.

ſally agreed, and think themſelves undoubtedly certain of it? and yet the words in which they are expreſs'd, may poſſibly bear another ſenſe. The ſame may be ſaid concerning the doctrines and precepts of the holy ſcriptures; and one great reaſon why men do not ſo generally agree in the ſenſe of theſe as of the other is becauſe the intereſts, and luſts, and paſſions of men are more concern'd in the one than the other. But whatever uncertainty there may be in the ſenſe of any texts of ſcripture, oral tradition is ſo far from affording us any help in this caſe, that it is a thouſand times more uncertain and leſs to be truſted to; eſpecially if we may take that to be the traditionary ſenſe of texts of ſcripture, which we meet with in the decretals *of their* popes, *and the* acts *of ſome of their* councils; *than which never was any thing in the whole world more abſurd and ridiculous: and whence may we expect to have the infallible traditional ſenſe of ſcripture, if not from the* heads *and* repreſentatives *of their church?*

This may abundantly ſuffice for the vindication of that paſſage *which Mr.* S. *makes ſuch a rude clamour about, as if I had therein deny'd the truth and certainty of all religion; but durſt never truſt the reader with a view of thoſe* words *of mine upon which he pretended to ground this calumny. But the world underſtands well enough, that all this was but a ſhift of Mr.* S's *for the ſatisfaction of his own party, and a pitiful art to avoid the vindication of* ſure-footing, *a task he had no mind to undertake.*

And yet the main deſign of this book *which he calls* faith vindicated, *&c. is to prove that which I do not believe any man living ever denied,* viz. *That what is true is not poſſible to be falſe: which, though it be one of the plaineſt truths in the world, yet he proves it ſo fooliſhly, as would make any man (if it were not evident*

of

of it self) *to doubt of it. He proves it from* logick, *and* nature, *and* metaphyſicks, *and* ethicks, *&c. I wonder he did not do it likewiſe from* arithmetick *and* geometry, the principles *whereof*, he * *tells us*, are concerned in demonſtrating the certainty of oral tradition. *He might alſo have proceeded to* aſtrology, *and* palmiſtry, *and* chymiſtry, *and have ſhewn how each of theſe lend their aſſiſtance to the evidencing of this truth. For* that *could not have been more ridiculous, than his* † *argument from the nature of* ſubject, *and* predicate, *and* copula in faith-propoſitions; *becauſe forſooth whoever affirms any propoſition of faith to be true, affirms it impoſſible to be falſe. Very true. But would any man argue, that what is true is impoſſible to be falſe, from the* nature *of* ſubject, predicate *and* copula? *for be the propoſition true or falſe, theſe are of the ſame* nature *in both, that is, they are* ſubject, predicate, *and* copula.

But that the reader *may have a taſte of his clear ſtile and way of reaſoning, I ſhall for* his *ſatisfaction tranſcribe Mr. S's whole argument from the* nature *of the* predicate. *His words are theſe.* § Our argument from the *copula*, is particularly ſtrengthned from the nature of the *predicate* in the propoſitions we ſpeak of; I mean in ſuch ſpeeches as affirm ſuch and ſuch points of faith to be true. For *true* means *exiſtent* in propoſitions which expreſs only the *an eſt* of a thing, as moſt points of faith do; which ſpeak abſtractedly, and tell not wherein the nature of the ſubject it ſpeaks of conſiſts, or the *quid eſt*. So that moſt of the propoſitions chriſtians are bound to profeſs are fully expreſs'd thus, *a trinity is exiſtent*, &c. and the like may be ſaid of thoſe points which belong to a thing or action paſt; as, *creation was*, &c. For, *exiſtent* is

* *Sure-footing*, p. 93. † *Faith vindic.* p. 6, 7, &c. § P. 9, 10, 11, 12.

the predicate in these two, only affixt to another difference of time; and 'tis equally impossible such subjects should *neither have been* nor *not have been*, or *have been* and *have not been* at once, as it is that a thing should neither *be* or *not be* at present, or both *be* and *not be* at present. Regarding then stedfastly the nature of our predicate [*existent*] we shall find that it expresses the utmost actuality of a thing; and as taken in the posture it bears in those propositions, that actually *exercis'd*, that is, the utmost actuality in its most actual state; that is, as absolutely excluding all manner or least degree of potentiality, and consequently all possibility of being otherwise; which is radically destroyed when all potentiality is taken away. This discourse holding, which in right to truth I shall not fear to affirm (unconcern'd in the drollery of any opposer) to be more than mathematically *demonstrative*, it follows inevitably that whoso is bound to profess a *trinity*, *incarnation*, &c. *is or was existent*, is also bound to profess that 'tis *impossible they should be not existent*; or which is all one, that 'tis impossible these points of faith should be false.

The same appears out of the nature of *distinction* or *division* applied to our predicate *existent*, as found in these propositions; for could that predicate bear a pertinent distinction expressing this and the other respect, or *thus* and *thus*, it might possibly *be* according to one of these respects, or thus *considered*, and *not be* according to another, that is *another way considered*: but this evasion is here impossible; for either those distinguishing notions must be more potential or antecedent to the notion of *existent*, and then they neither reach *existent*, nor supervene to it as its determinations or actuations, which differences ought to do; nor can any notion be more

actual

actual or *determinative* in the line of *ſubſtance* or being, than *exiſtent* is; and, ſo fit to diſtinguiſh it in that line; nor, laſtly, can any determination in the line of accidents ſerve the turn; for, thoſe ſuppoſe exiſtence already put, and ſo the whole truth of the propoſition entire and complete antecedently to them: 'Tis impoſſible therefore that what is thus affirmed to be *true*, ſhould in any regard be affirmed *poſſible to be falſe:* the impoſſibility of diſtinguiſhing the predicate pertinently, excluding here all poſſibility of divers reſpects.

The ſame is demonſtrated from the impoſſibility of diſtinguiſhing the ſubjects of thoſe faith-propoſitions; for thoſe ſubjects being propoſitions themſelves, and accepted for *truths*, as is ſuppoſed, they are incapable of diſtinction, as ſhall be particularly ſhewn hereafter. Beſides, thoſe ſubjects being points of faith, and ſo ſtanding in the abſtract, that is, not deſcending to ſubſuming reſpects, even in that regard too they are freed from all pertinent diſtinguiſhableneſs.

The ſame is demonſtrated from the nature of *truth*, which conſiſts in an indiviſible; whence there is nothing of *truth* had, how great ſoever the conceived approaches towards it may be, till all *may-not-bees*, or potentiality to be otherwiſe, be utterly excluded by the actuality of *is* or exiſtence; which put or diſcover'd, the light of *truth* breaks forth, and the dim twilights of *may-not-bees* vaniſh and diſappear.

I have here (reader) *preſented thee with a diſcourſe which (if we may believe Mr.* S.) is more than mathematically demonſtrative. *A rare ſight indeed! And is not this a pleaſant man, and of good aſſurance? I now find it true, which he* * *ſays elſe-*

* *Letter of thanks*, p. 1.

where,

where, that principles are of an inflexible *genius*, and self-confident too, and that they love naturally to express themselves with an assuredness. *But certainly the sacred* names *of* principles *and* demonstration *were never so profan'd by any man before. Might not any one write a book of such* jargon, *and call it demonstration? And would it not equally serve to prove or confute? If he intended this* stuff *for the satisfaction of the people, he might as well have writ in the* coptick *or* sclavonian *language: yet I cannot deny, but that it is very suitable to the principles of the* Roman church; *for why should not their* science *as well as their* service *be in an unknown tongue? and that the one may be as fit to improve their knowledge, as the other is to raise their devotion. But if he designed this for the learned, nothing could be more improper; for they are far less apt to admire* nonsense *than the common people: and I desire that no man (how learned soever he may think himself) would be over-confident, that this is sense. I do verily believe, that neither* Harphius, *nor* Rusbrochius, *nor the profound* mother Juliana, *have any thing in their writings more senseless and obscure than this discourse of his, which he* affirms to be more than mathematically demonstrative. *So that if I were worthy to advise Mr.* S. *he should give over this pretence to* science; *for whatever he may think, his talent certainly does not lie that way; but he seems to be as well made for a* mystical divine, *as any man I know; and methinks his* superiors *should be sensible of this, and employ him to write about the* deiform fund of the soul, *the* super-essential life, *the* method of self-annihilation, *and the* passive unions of nothing with nothing: *these are profound* subjects, *and he hath a* style *peculiarly fitted for them. For even in this* parcel of stuff

which

which I have now cited, there are five or six words, *such as* may-not-bees, potentiality, actuality, actuation, determinative, supervene and subsume, *which (if they were but well mingled and discreetly ordered, and brought in now and then with a* that is, *to explain one another) would half set up a man in that way, and enable him to write as mystical a discourse as a man would wish. But enough of this. And I have trespass'd not a little upon mine own disposition in saying thus much, though out of a just indignation at confident nonsense.*

It is time now to draw toward a conclusion of this debate. I shall only leave with the reader *a few observations concerning this* book *of Mr.* S*'s and his doctrine of infallibility.*

First, *That the main drift of his* book *being to prove, that what is true is impossible to be false, he opposes no body that I know of in this matter.*

Secondly, *That in asserting infallibility to be necessary to the true nature of faith he hath the generality of his own church his professed adversaries. The church of* Rome *never arrogated to her self any other infallibility but what she pretends to be founded upon* CHRIST*'s promise to secure his church always from error by a* supernatural assistance, *which is widely different from Mr.* S*'s rational infallibility of* oral tradition. *Mr.* S. *surely cannot be ignorant, that the* divines *of their church (till Mr.* Rushworth *and Mr.* White *found out this new way) did generally resolve faith into the infallible testimony of the church, and the infallibility of their church into our* SAVIOUR*'s promise; and the evidence of the true church into the* marks of the church, *or* the motives of credibility, *which* motives *are acknowledg'd to be only* prudential, *and not* demonstrative.

tive. * Bellarmine *says, that the* marks *of the church do not make it* evidently true, *which is the true church, but only* evidently credible; and that *(says he)* is said to be evidently credible which is neither seen in it self, nor in its principles; but yet hath so many and so weighty testimonies, that every wise man hath reason to believe it. *Becanus* † *to the same purpose*, that the motives of credibility are only the foundation of a prudent, but not of an infallible assent. *I know very well that Mr.* Knott *and some others would fain persuade us, that an assent* in some sort *infallible may be built upon* prudential motives, *which is as absurd as it's possible; but if it were true, yet Mr.* S. *would not accept of this* sort of *infallibility; nothing less will serve him than* demonstrative motives, *and such as are* absolutely conclusive of the thing. Stapleton *(as Mr.* Cressy *tells us) expressly says, that such* an infallible certitude of means *is not now necessary to the* pastors *of the church, as was necessary to the* apostles, *who were the first founders of the church. So that, according to these* authors, *there may be true faith where neither the means nor the motives of it are such as to raise our assent to the degree of infallibility. And this is as much to the full as any* protestant *(that I know of) ever said. Nay, even his* friends *of the* tradition, *Mr.* Rushworth, *Mr.* White *and Mr.* Cressy, *are guilty of the same* damnable and fundamental error, *as Mr.* S. *calls it* ‖. *For they grant less assurance than that which is infallible to be sufficient to christian faith, and that we are justly condemn'd if we refuse to believe upon such evidence as does ordinarily satisfy prudent men in human affairs. And particu-*

* L. 4. de Eccles. † Sum. Tom. 2. partic. de fide, *c.* 1.
‖ *Letter to his Answerer*, p. 5.

larly,

larly, Mr. Wh. *makes a queſtion whether human nature be capable of infallibility; as I have ſhewn at large by a clear and full teſtimony out of each of theſe* authors, *in the* anſwer *to* ſure-footing †. *Of which* teſtimonies, *though Mr.* S. *hath not thought fit to take the leaſt notice throughout his* book; *yet I cannot but think it a reaſonable requeſt, to deſire him to vindicate the* divines *of his own church (eſpecially thoſe of his own way) from theſe things, before he charge us any farther with them.*

Thirdly, *that Mr.* S. *by this* principle, *that infallibility is neceſſary to the true nature of faith, makes every true believer infallible in matters of faith; which is ſuch a* paradox, *as I doubt whether ever it enter'd into any other man's mind. But if it be true, what need then of any infallibility in* pope *or* council? *and if this infallibility be grounded upon the nature of oral tradition, what need of ſupernatural aſſiſtance? I doubt Mr.* S. *would be loth to preach this doctrine at* Rome; *I have often heard, that there is an old teſty* gentleman *lives there, who would take it very ill that any one beſides himſelf ſhould pretend to be infallible.*

Fourthly, *that Mr.* S. *by* his *principles does plainly exclude from ſalvation the generality of his own church, that is, all that do not believe upon* his *grounds. And this is the neceſſary conſequence of his reaſoning in a late* treatiſe, *intituled,* the method to arrive at ſatisfaction in religion: *the principles whereof are theſe; that* the church is a congregation of faithful; *the* faithful *are thoſe* who have true faith; *that,* till it be known which is the true faith, it cannot be known which is the true church; *that* which is the true faith, can only be known by the true rule of faith; *which is*

† P. 120, &c.

oral tradition; *and that the infallibility of* this rule *is* evident to common ſenſe. *And from theſe principles he concludes* *, *that* thoſe who follow not this rule, and ſo are out of this church, can have no true faith; *and that* though many of the points to which they aſſent are true, yet their aſſent is not faith; for faith (ſpeaking of chriſtian faith) is an aſſent which cannot poſſibly be falſe. *So that the foundation of this method is the ſelf-evident infallibility of oral tradition, which hath been ſufficiently conſider'd in the* anſwer to ſure-footing, *which yet remains unanſwer'd. That which I am now concern'd to take notice of, is the conſequence of this* method, *which does at one blow excommunicate and un-chriſtian the far greateſt part of his own church. For if all who do not* follow oral tradition *as their only rule of faith are out of the church, and can have no true faith, then all who follow the* council of Trent *are* ipſo facto *no chriſtians. For nothing is plainer, than* that council *did not make oral tradition the ſole rule of their faith, nor rely upon it as ſuch; which hath been prov'd at large in the* anſwer *to* ſure-footing.

But why is Mr. S. *ſo zealous in this matter of infallibility? There is a plain reaſon for it. He finds that confidence, how weakly ſoever it be grounded, hath ſome effect upon the common and ignorant people; who are apt to think there is ſomething more than ordinary in a ſwaggering man, that talks of nothing but* principles *and* demonſtration. *And ſo we ſee it in ſome other profeſſions. There are a ſort of people very well known, who find that the moſt effectual way to cheat the people is always to pretend to* infallible *cures.*

* Sect. 21.

I have now done with his infallibility. But I must not forget this letter of thanks. *I shall wholly pass by the passion and ill language of it, which a man may plainly see to have proceeded from a gall'd and uneasy mind. He would fain put on some pleasantness, but was not able to conceal his vexation. Nor shall I insist upon his palpable shuffling about the explication of the terms* rule *and* faith. *He was convinced that he had explained them very untowardly, and therefore would gladly come off by saying* ‖ *that he did not intend* explication, *but only to* predicate *or* affirm *something of them. And yet the whole design of the first page of* sure-footing *is to shew the necessity of beginning with the* meaning of those words which express the thing under debate. *And this* method *he tells us he will* apply to his present purpose, *and will examine well what is* meant *by those* words *which express the thing he was to discuss, namely, the* rule of faith. *Now if to* examine well what is meant by words, *be not to go about to* explain *them, I must confess myself to be in a great error. Of the same kind is his apology for his* testimonies, *as if they were* * not intended against the protestants; *whereas his* book *was writ against the* protestants, *and when he comes to his* testimonies, *he* † *declares the design of them to be, to* second by authority *what he had before established by* reason. *So that if the* rational part *of his* book *was intended against the protestants, and the* testimonies *were designed to second it, I cannot understand why he should say* one *was less intended against them than the* other. *But it seems he is so conscious of the weakness of those testimonies, that he does not think them fit to satisfy any but those who believe him already.*

‖ P. 7. * P. 105. † *Sure-footing*, p. 126.

As to his charge of false citations, *it is but the common artifice of the Roman controvertists when they have nothing else to say. However that the world may see how little he is to be trusted, I shall instance in two or three about which he makes the loudest clamour, and leave it to the* reader *to judge by these of his sincerity in the rest.*

* *He says, I notoriously abuse the* preface *to* Rushworth's dialogues *in citing the* author *of it to say that* such certainty as makes the cause always to work the same effect though it take not away the absolute possibility of working otherwise, ought absolutely to be reckon'd in the degree of true certainty; *whereas (says Mr.* S.) *he only tells us there,* p. 7. that by moral certainty [some understood] such a certainty as makes the cause, *&c. To vindicate my self in this,* I *shall only set the* author's *words before the* reader's *eyes. They are these. This* term *moral certainty,* every one explicated not alike; but some understood by it such a certainty as makes the cause always work the same effect, though it take not away the absolute possibility of working otherwise. Others call'd that a *moral certainty* which proceeds from, *&c.* A third explication of this word is, *&c.* Of these three the first ought absolutely to be reckon'd in the degree of true certainty, and the authors consider'd as mistaken in undervaluing it. *Is this only to tell us that by moral certainty* some understood, *&c. Does not the* prefacer *also expressly affirm, that what these* some understood by moral certainty, ought absolutely to be reckon'd in the degree of true certainty? *which is the very thing I cited him for.*

† *Another heavy charge is, that* according to my usual sincerity, *I quote* Rushworth's *nephew to say,*

* P. 62. † P. 65.

that

that a few good words are to be caſt in concerning ſcripture, [for the ſatisfaction of indifferent men who have been brought up in this verbal and apparent reſpect of the ſcripture,] whereas (*ſays Mr.* S.) in the place you cite, he only expreſſes, it would be a ſatisfaction to indifferent men to ſee the poſitions one would induce them to embrace, maintainable by ſcripture. *Does he only ſay ſo? let the reader judge. The words in Mr.* Ruſhworth * *are theſe:* yet this I muſt tell ye, that it were a great ſatisfaction for indifferent men, that have been brought up in this verbal and apparent reſpect of the ſcripture, to ſee that the poſitions you would induce them unto, can be and are maintain'd by ſcripture, and that they are grounded therein. *Certainly one would think that either this man has no eyes or no forehead.*

But the greateſt out-cry of all is, that I abuſe his firſt demonſtration *by virtue of a direct falſification both of his words and ſenſe, by cogging in the word* [all] *making his principle run thus, that* the greateſt hopes and fears are applied to the minds of [all] chriſtians. *This indeed I make to be his* principle *grounded upon his words which I had cited a little before; and they are theſe*, firſt; that chriſtian doctrine was at firſt unanimouſly ſettled by the apoſtles in the hearts of the faithful diſpers'd in great multitudes over ſeveral parts of the world. 2*ly*, that this doctrine was firmly believed by [all] thoſe faithful to be the way to heaven, and the contradicting or deſerting of it to be the way to damnation; ſo that the greateſt hopes and fears imaginable were, by engaging the divine authority, ſtrongly apply'd to the minds of the firſt believers, *&c.*

* P. 76, 77.

Now

Now if theſe firſt believers, *to whom he ſays*, theſe hopes and fears were ſtrongly apply'd, *be* all thoſe faithful *he ſpoke of before*, *which were* diſpers'd over ſeveral parts of the world, *(as the tenor of his words plainly ſhews) what are theſe leſs than all the chriſtians of that age? and he himſelf a little after tells us, there is the ſame reaſon of the following ages. So that I made his* principle run no otherwiſe *than he himſelf had laid it. And if it contradict what he ſays elſewhere, it is no new or ſtrange thing. I wonder more at his confidence in charging ſuch* falſifications *upon me as every man's eyes will preſently confute him in. Methinks though a man had all* ſcience, *and all* principles, *yet it might not be amiſs to have ſome* conſcience.

I ſhall only ſpeak a few words to the two ſolid points, *(as I may call them) of his* letter, *and I have done.*

I had charg'd him that he makes traditious certainty a firſt *and* ſelf-evident principle, *and yet that he goes about to demonſtrate it; which I ſaid was impoſſible to be done, and if it could be done was needleſs. To avoid this inconvenience which he found himſelf ſorely preſs'd withal, he diſtinguiſhes between* ſpeculative *and* practical *ſelf-evidence, and ſays that things which are* practically *ſelf-evident may be demonſtrated, but thoſe that are* ſpeculatively *ſo, cannot. But he muſt not think to ſhelter himſelf from ſo palpable an abſurdity by this impertinent diſtinction. For let things be* evident *how they will,* ſpeculatively *or* practically, *'tis plain that if they be principles* evident of themſelves *they need nothing to evidence them; and if they be* firſt *principles there can be nothing to make them more evident, becauſe there is nothing before them to demonſtrate them by. Now if Mr.* S. *had in truth believed that the certainty*

of

of tradition was a firſt *and* ſelf-evident principle, *he ſhould by all means have let it alone, for it was in a very good condition to ſhift for it ſelf; but his blind way of demonſtration is enough to caſt a miſt about the cleareſt truth in the world. But perhaps by the* ſelf-evident *certainty of tradition, Mr.* S. *only means that it is evident to* himſelf; *for I dare ſay it is ſo to no body elſe. And if that be his meaning, he did well enough to endeavour to demonſtrate it; it was no more than needed.*

The other point is about his firſt principles, *ſuch as theſe,* a rule is a rule, faith is faith, *&c. which he ſays* * muſt principle all that can be ſolidly concluded either about *rule* or *faith. Of theſe he hath mighty ſtore, and bleſſeth himſelf in it, as the* rich man *in the* goſpel *did in his full barns,* ſoul, take thine eaſe, thou haſt *principles* laid up for many years; *and out of an exceſs of good-nature pities my caſe, who did* † undertake to write a diſcourſe about the ground of faith, without ſo much as one principle to bleſs my ſelf with. *But the miſchief is, that after all this ſtir about them they are good for nothing, and of the very ſame ſtamp with that frivolous one* Ariſtole ‖ *ſpeaks of* [if a thing be, it is,] *which he rejects as a vain and ridiculous propoſition. Such are Mr.* S's *firſt principles,* ſurfeited of too much truth (*as an ingenious* writer *of his own church ſays of them*) *and ready to burſt with ſelf-evidence, and yet by ten thouſand of them a man ſhall not be able to advance one ſtep in knowledge, becauſe they produce no concluſion but themſelves; whereas it is of the nature of principles to yield a concluſion different from themſelves. And to convince Mr.* S. *fully of the foolery of theſe principles, I will try what can be done with them, either in a* catago-

* P. 11. † P. 74. ‖ Analyt. Poſter. l. 7.

rical

rical *or* hypothetical *syllogism*, *e. g.* A rule is a rule, tradition is a rule, *ergo*, tradition is a rule. *Again*, if a rule be a rule, then a rule is a rule; but a rule is a rule, *ergo*. *How is any man the wiser for all this? but it may be Mr.* S. *can make better work with them, and manage them more dextrously, so as to* principle *any thing that can* be solidly concluded *in any controversy.*

And now I hope at last to have given Mr. S. *full satisfaction; since he has brought me to the very point he desir'd, to acknowledge* that I have no principles. *And indeed if there be no other to be had but such as these, I do declare to all the world, that I neither have any* principles, *nor will have any.*

SER-

SERMON I.

The wisdom of being religious.

JOB xxviii. 28.

And unto man he said, behold, the fear of the LORD, *that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.*

SERM. I.

IN this chapter Job discourseth of the secrets of nature, and the unsearchable perfections of the works of GOD. And the result of his discourse is this, that a perfect knowledge of nature is no where to be found but in the author of it; no less wisdom and understanding than that which made the world, and contrived this vast and regular frame of nature, can thoroughly understand the philosophy of it, and comprehend so vast a design: but yet there is a knowledge which is very proper to man, and lies level to human understanding; and that is the knowledge of our creator, and of the duty we owe to him; the wisdom of pleasing GOD, by doing what he commands, and avoiding what he forbids: this knowledge and wisdom may be attained by man, and is sufficient to make him happy. "And unto man he said, "behold, the fear of the LORD that is wisdom, and "to depart from evil is understanding."

These words consist of two propositions, which are not distinct in sense, but one and the same thing variously express'd; for wisdom and understanding are synonymous words here; and though sometimes they have different notions, yet in the poetical books of

I.

SERM. I. scripture they are most frequently used as words equivalent, and do both of them indifferently signify either a speculative knowledge of things, or a practical skill about them, according to the exigency of the matter or thing spoken of. And so likewise the fear of the LORD, and departure from evil, are phrases of a very near sense, and like importance; and therefore we find them several times put together in scripture:

Prov. iii. 7. "fear the LORD, and depart from evil:" "by the fear
Prov. xvi. 6. "of the LORD men depart from evil." So that they differ only as cause and effect, which by a metonymy usual in all sorts of authors, are frequently put one for another.

Now, to fear the LORD and to depart from evil are phrases, which the scripture useth in a very great latitude, to express to us the sum of religion, and the whole of our duty. And because the large usage of these phrases is to be the foundation of my following discourse, I shall for the farther clearing of this matter endeavour to shew these two things:

1. That 'tis very usual in the language of scripture to express the whole of religion by these and such like phrases.

2. The particular fitness of these two phrases to describe religion.

I. It is very usual in the language of scripture to express the whole of religion by some eminent principle or part of religion.

The great principles of religion are knowledge, faith, remembrance, love, and fear; by all which the scripture useth to express the whole duty of man.

In the old testament, by the knowledge, remem-
Pro. xxx. 3. brance and fear of GOD. Religion is called "the know-

"ledge

" ledge of the holy." And wicked men are described to be such as " know not GOD." So likewise, by the fear of the LORD, frequently in this book of Job, and in the Psalms and Proverbs. And, " then they that " feared the LORD spake often one to another." And the fear of GOD is expressly said to be the sum of religion, " fear GOD and keep his commandments, for " this is the whole of man:" and on the contrary, the wicked are described to be such as " have not the " fear of GOD before their eyes." And so likewise by the remembrance of GOD, " remember thy crea- " tor in the days of thy youth;" that is, enter upon a religious course betimes: and on the contrary, the character of the wicked is, that they forget GOD; " the wicked shall be turned into hell; and all the " nations that forget GOD." In the new testament, religion is usually expressed by faith in GOD and CHRIST, and the love of them. Hence it is, that true Christians are so frequently called believers, and wicked and ungodly men unbelievers: and that good men are described to be such as love God. " All things " shall work together for good to them that love " GOD;" and " such as love the LORD JESUS CHRIST." Now the reason why these are put for the whole of religion, is, because the belief, and knowledge, and remembrance, and love, and fear of GOD, are such powerful principles, and have so great an influence upon men to make them religious, that where any one of these really is, all the rest, together with the true and genuine effects of them, are supposed to be.

SERM. I.

Jer. x. 25. Mal. iii. 16. Eccl. xii. 13. Psa. xxxvi. 1. Eccl. xii. 1. Psal. ix. 17. Rom. viii. 28. Eph. vi. 24.

And so likewise the sum of all religion is often expressed by some eminent part of it; which will explain the second phrase here in the text, departing

SERM. I.

from evil. The worship of GOD is an eminent part of religion; and prayer, which is often in scripture expressed by seeking GOD, and calling upon his name, is a chief part of religious worship. Hence religion is described by seeking GOD, "he is a rewarder of "them that diligently seek him:" and by calling upon his name, "whosoever calleth upon the name "of the LORD, shall be saved." And so by coming to GOD, and by departing from evil. In this fallen state of man, religion begins with repentance and conversion, the two opposite terms of which, are GOD and sin: hence it is that religion is described sometimes by coming to GOD, "he that cometh to GOD, "must believe that he is;" that is, no man can be religious, unless he believe there is a GOD; sometimes by departing from sin, "and he that departeth "from evil, maketh himself a prey:" that is, such was the bad state of those times of which the prophet there complains that no man could be religious but he was in danger of being persecuted.

Heb. xi. 6.

Acts ii. 21.

Heb. xi. 6.

Isa. lix. 15.

II. For the fitness of these two phrases to describe religion.

1. For the first, (the fear of the LORD) the fitness of this phrase will appear, if we consider how great an influence the fear of GOD hath upon men to make them religious. Fear is a passion that is most deeply rooted in our natures, and flows immediately from that principle of self-preservation which GOD hath planted in every man. Every one desires his own preservation and happiness, and therefore hath a natural dread and horror of every thing that can destroy his being, or endanger his happiness. And the greatest danger is from the greatest power, and that is omni-

SERM. I.

omnipotency. So that the fear of GOD is an inward acknowledgment of a holy and just being, which is armed with an almighty and irresistible power; GOD having hid in every man's conscience a secret awe and dread of his infinite power, and eternal justice. Now fear being so intimate to our natures, it is the strongest bond of laws, and the great security of our duty.

There are two bridles or restraints which GOD hath put upon human nature, shame and fear. Shame is the weaker, and hath place only in those in whom there are some remainders of virtue. Fear is the stronger, and works upon all who love themselves and desire their own preservation. Therefore in this degenerate state of mankind, fear is that passion which hath the greatest power over us, and by which GOD and his laws take the surest hold of us: our desire, and love, and hope, are not so apt to be wrought upon by the representation of virtue, and the promises of reward and happiness, as our fear is from the apprehensions of divine displeasure. For though we have lost in a great measure the gust and relish of true happiness, yet we still retain a quick sense of pain and misery. So that fear relies upon a natural love of our selves, and is complicated with a necessary desire of our own preservation. And therefore religion usually makes it's first entrance into us by this passion; hence perhaps it is that Solomon more than once calls "the fear of the LORD the beginning of wis-"dom."

2. As for the second phrase [departing from evil] the fitness of it to express the whole duty of man, will appear, if we consider the necessary connexion that is between

SERM. I. between the negative and the positive part of our duty. He that is careful to avoid all sin will sincerely endeavour to perform his duty. For the soul of man is an active principle, and will be employed one way or other, it will be doing something; if a man abstain from evil, he will do good. Now there being such a strait connexion between these, the whole of our duty may be expressed by either of them; but most fitly by departing from evil, because that is the first part of our duty. Religion begins in the forsaking of sin:

Virtus est vitium fugere, & sapientia prima
Stultitia caruisse ——

"Virtue begins in the forsaking of vice; and the first "part of wisdom is not to be a fool." And therefore the scripture, which mentions these parts of our duty, doth constantly put departing from evil first;

Ps. xxxiv. 14. and xxxvii. 27. Isa. i. 16, 17. and lv. 7. Eph. iv. 22, 23, 24. 1 Pet. iii. 11.

"depart from evil and do good. Cease to do evil, "learn to do well." "Let the wicked forsake his "way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and "let him return unto the LORD." We are first to "put off the old man which is corrupt according to "deceitful lusts," and then "to be renewed in the "spirit of our minds, and to put on the new man, "&c." "let him eschew evil and do good." To all which I may add this farther consideration, that the law of GOD contained in the ten commandments, consisting mostly of prohibitions, (thou shalt not do such or such a thing) our observance of it is most fitly expressed by departing from evil, which yet includes obedience likewise to the positive precepts implied in those prohibitions.

Having

Having thus explained the words, I come now to consider the proposition contained in them, which is this: SERM. I.

That religion is the best knowledge and wisdom.

This I shall endeavour to make good these three ways.

1 By a direct proof of it.

2. By shewing on the contrary the folly and ignorance of irreligion and wickedness.

3. By vindicating religion from those common imputations which seem to charge it with ignorance or imprudence.

I begin with the direct proof of this: and because religion comprehends two things, the knowledge of the principles of it, and a suitable life and practice; (the first of which being speculative, may more properly be called knowledge; and the latter, because 'tis practical, may be called wisdom or prudence) therefore I shall endeavour distinctly to prove these two things.

1. That religion is the best knowledge.

2. That 'tis the truest wisdom.

1. First, that it is the best knowledge.

The knowledge of religion commends itself to us upon these two accounts.

1. 'Tis the knowledge of those things which are in themselves most excellent.

2. Of those things which are most useful and necessary for us to know.

First, it is the best knowledge, because it is the knowledge of those things which are in themselves most excellent and desirable to be known; and those are GOD, and our duty. GOD is the sum and com-

SERM. I.

prehension of all perfection. It is delightful to know the creatures, because there are particular excellencies scattered and dispersed among them, which are some shadows of the divine perfections: but in GOD all perfections in their highest degree and exaltation meet together and are united. How much more delightful then must it needs be to fix our minds upon such an object in which there is nothing but beauty and brightness, what is amiable, and what is excellent; what will ravish our affections and raise our wonder, please us and astonish us at once; and that the finite measure and capacity of our understandings is not able to take in and comprehend the infinite perfections of GOD, this indeed shews the excellency of the object, but doth not altogether take away the delightfulness of the knowledge. For as it is pleasant to the eye to have an endless prospect, so is it some pleasure to a finite understanding to view unlimited excellencies which have no shore or bounds, though it cannot comprehend them. There is a pleasure in admiration; and this is that which properly causeth admiration, when we discover a great deal in an object which we understand to be excellent, and yet we see we know not how much more beyond that, which our understandings cannot fully reach and comprehend.

And as the knowledge of GOD in his nature and perfections is excellent and desirable, so likewise to know him in those glorious manifestations of himself in the works of creation and providence; and above all, in that stupendious work of the redemption of the world by JESUS CHRIST, which was such a mystery, and so excellent a piece of knowledge that the

1 Pet. i 12. "the angels" are said to "desire to pry into it."

And

SERM. I.

And as the knowledge of God is excellent, so likewise of our duty, which is nothing else but virtue and goodness and holiness, which are the image of God, a conformity to the nature and will of God, and an imitation of the divine excellencies and perfections, so far as we are capable: for to know our duty is to know what it is to be like God in goodness, and piety, and patience, and clemency, in pardoning injuries, and passing by provocations; in justice and righteousness, in truth and faithfulness, and in a hatred and detestation of the contrary of these: in a word, it is to know what is the good and acceptable will of God, what it is that he loves and delights in, and is pleased withal, and would have us to do in order to our perfection and our happiness. It is deservedly accounted a piece of excellent knowledge to know the laws of the land, and the customs of the country we live in, and the will of the prince we live under: how much more, to know the statutes of heaven, and the laws of eternity, those immutable and eternal rules of justice and righteousness; to know the will and pleasure of the great monarch and universal king of the world, and the customs of that country where we must live for ever? This made David to admire the law of God at that strange rate, and to advance the knowledge of it above all other knowledge, "I "have seen an end of all perfection, but thy com- "mandment is exceeding broad." Psal. cxix. 96.

Secondly, it is the knowledge of those things which are most useful and necessary for us to know. The goodness of every thing is measured by it's end and use, and that is the best thing which serves the best end and purpose; and the more necessary any thing

SERM. I.

is to such an end, the better it is: so that the best knowledge is that which is of greatest use and necessity to us in order to our great end, which is eternal happiness, and the salvation of our souls. Curious speculations, and the contemplation of things that are impertinent to us, and do not concern us, nor serve to promote our happiness, are but a more specious and ingenious sort of idleness, a more pardonable and creditable kind of ignorance. That man that doth not know those things which are of use and necessity for him to know is but an ignorant man, whatever he may know besides. Now the knowledge of GOD, and of CHRIST, and of our duty, is of the greatest usefulness and necessity to us in order to our happiness. It is of absolute necessity that we should know GOD and CHRIST, in order to our being happy; Joh. xvii. 3. "this is life eternal (that is, the only way to it) "to know thee the only true GOD, and him whom "thou hast sent, JESUS CHRIST." It is necessary also in order to our happiness to know our duty; because it is necessary for us to do it, and it is impossible to do it except we know it.

So that whatsoever other knowledge a man may be endued withal, he is but an ignorant person who doth not know GOD, the author of his being, the preserver and protector of his life, his sovereign and his judge, the giver of every good and perfect gift, his surest refuge in trouble, his best friend or worst enemy, the present support of his life, his hopes in death, his future happiness, and his portion for ever: who does not know his relation to GOD, the duty that he owes him, and the way to please him who can make him happy or miserable for ever: who doth

not know the LORD JESUS CHRIST, who is the way, the truth, and the life. SERM. I.

If a man by a vast and imperious mind, and a heart large as the sand upon the sea-shore, (as it is said of Solomon) could command all the knowledge of nature and art, of words and things; could attain to a mastery in all languages, and sound the depths of all arts and sciences, measure the earth and the heaven, and tell the stars, and declare their orders and motions; could discourse of the interests of all states, the intrigues of all courts, the reason of all civil laws and constitutions, and give an account of the history of all ages; could speak of trees, "from "the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the "hyssop that springs out of the wall; and of beasts "also and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of "fishes:" and yet should, in the mean time, be destitute of the knowledge of GOD and CHRIST, and his duty; all this would be but an impertinent vanity, and a more glittering kind of ignorance; and such a man (like the philosopher, who whilst he was gazing upon the stars, fell into the ditch) would but *sapienter descendere in infernum*, be undone with all this knowledge, and with a great deal of wisdom go down to hell.

2. Secondly, that to be religious is the truest wisdom, and that likewise upon two accounts.

1. Because it is to be wise for our selves.

2. It is to be wise as to our main interest and concernment.

1. 'Tis to be wise for ourselves. There is an expression, Job xxii. 21. "he that is wise is profitable "to himself;" and Prov. ix. 12. "if thou be wise,

SERM. I. "thou shalt be wise for thy self:" intimating that wisdom regards a man's own interest and advantage, and that he is not a wise man that doth not take care of himself and his own concernments, according to that of old Ennius, *nequicquam sapere sapientem, qui sibi ipsi prodesse non quiret*, that man hath but an empty title of wisdom, and is not really wise, who is not wise for himself. As self-preservation is the first principle of nature, so care of our selves and our own interest is the first part of wisdom. He that is wise in the affairs and concernments of other men, but careless and negligent of his own, that man may be said to be busy, but he is not wise: he is employed indeed, but not so as a wise man should be: now this is the wisdom of religion, that it directs a man to a care of his own proper interest and concernment.

2. It is to be wise as to our main interest. Our chief end and highest interest is happiness: and this is happiness to be freed from all, (if it may) however from the greatest evils; and to enjoy (if it may be) all good, however the chiefest. To be happy is not only to be freed from the pains and diseases of the body, but from anxiety and vexation of spirit: not only to enjoy the pleasures of sense, but peace of conscience, and tranquillity of mind. To be happy, is not only to be so for a little while, but as long as may be; and if it be possible, for ever. Now religion designs our greatest and longest happiness; it aims at a freedom from the greatest evils, and to bring us to the possession and enjoyment of the greatest good. For religion wisely considers that men have immortal spirits, which as they are spirits are capable of a pleasure and happiness distinct from that of our bodies and

and our senses; and because they are immortal, are capable of an everlasting happiness. Now our souls being the best part of our selves, and eternity being infinitely the most considerable duration, the greatest wisdom is to secure the interest of our souls and of eternity, though it be with loss and to the prejudice of our temporal and inferior interests. Therefore religion directs us rather to secure inward peace than outward ease, to be more careful to avoid everlasting and intolerable torment than short and light afflictions which are but for a moment; to court the favour of GOD more than the friendship of the world, and not so much "to fear them that can kill the body, "and after that have no more that they can do, as "him who after he hath killed, can destroy both body "and soul in hell:" in a word, our main interest is to be as happy as we can, and as long as is possible; and if we be cast into such circumstances, that we must be either in part and for a time, or else wholly and always miserable, the best wisdom is to chuse the greatest and most lasting happiness, but the least and shortest misery. Upon this account religion prefers those pleasures which flow from the presence of GOD for evermore, infinitely before the transitory pleasures of this world, and is much more careful to avoid eternal misery than present sufferings. This is the wisdom of religion, that upon consideration of the whole, and casting up all things together, it does advise and lead us to our best interest. SERM. I.

II. The second way of confirmation shall be by endeavouring to shew the ignorance and folly of irreligion. Now all that are irreligious are so upon one of these two accounts: either, first, because they do

SERM. I.

do not believe the foundations and principles of religion, as the existence of GOD, the immortality of the soul, and future rewards: or else, secondly, because though they do in some sort believe these things, yet they live contrary to this their belief; and of this kind are the far greatest part of wicked men. The first sort are guilty of that which we call speculative, the other of practical atheism. I shall endeavour to shew the ignorance and folly of both these.

First, speculative atheism is unreasonable, and that upon these five accounts. 1. Because it gives no tolerable account of the existence of the world. 2. Nor does it give any reasonable account of the universal consent of mankind in this apprehension, that there is a GOD. 3. It requires more evidence for things than they are capable of. 4. The atheist pretends to know that which no man can know. 5. Atheism contradicts itself.

I. Because it gives no tolerable account of the existence of the world. One of the greatest difficulties that lies in the atheist's way is, upon his own supposition that there is no GOD, to give a likely account of the existence of the world. We see this vast frame of the world, and an innumerable multitude of creatures in it, all which we who believe a GOD attribute to him as the author of them. For a being supposed of infinite goodness and wisdom and power is a very likely cause of these things. What more likely to make this vast world, to stretch forth the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth, and to form these and all things in them of nothing, than infinite power? what more likely to communicate being and so many degrees of happiness to so many

several

several sorts of creatures, than infinite goodness? what more likely to contrive this admirable frame of the universe and all the creatures in it, each of them so perfect in their kind, and all of them so fitted to each other and to the whole, than infinite counsel and wisdom? This seems to be no unreasonable account. SERM. I.

But let us see now what account the atheist gives of these things. If there be no GOD there are but these two ways imaginable for the world to be. Either it must be said, that not only the matter but also the frame of this world is eternal; and that, as to the main, things always were as they are, without any first cause of their being; which is the way of the Aristotelian atheist; (those I mean, who proceed upon Aristotle's supposition of the eternity of the world, but yet deny it to be from GOD, which he expressly asserts:) or else the matter of the world being supposed to be eternal and of it self, the original of this vast and beautiful frame must be ascribed merely to chance, and the casual concourse of the parts of matter; which is the way of the Epicurean atheist. But neither of these ways gives a tolerable account of the existence of the world.

1. I shall first consider the hypothesis of those whom for distinction sake I call the Aristotelian atheists, which is this; that not only the matter but also the frame of the world is eternal; and that, as to the main, it was always as it is, of it self; and that there hath been from all eternity a succession of men and other creatures without any first cause of their being.

It seems to be very hard, and if that would do any good might be just matter of complaint, that we are fallen into so prophane and sceptical an age, which

takes

SERM. I.

takes a pleasure and a pride in unravelling almost all the received principles both of religion and reason: so that we are put many times to prove those things which can hardly be made plainer than they are of themselves. And such almost are these principles, that GOD is, and that all things are made by him; which by reason of the bold cavils of perverse and unreasonable men we are now a-days put to defend.

That something is of itself is evident, because we see things are. And the things that we see must either have had some first cause of their being, or have been always and of themselves. One of these two is unavoidable.

So that the controversy between us and this sort of atheists comes to this; which is the more credible opinion, that the world was never made, nor had a beginning, but always was as it is, and that there hath been from all eternity a succession of men and other creatures without any first cause of their being; or, that there was from all eternity such a being as we conceive GOD to be, infinite in power, goodness and wisdom, which made us and all other things: the first of these opinions I shall shew to be altogether incredible, and the latter to have all the credibility and evidence of which a thing of that nature is capable, and such evidence as is sufficient to convince any impartial and considerate man.

Now in comparing the probabilities of things, that we may know on which side the advantage lies, these two considerations are of great moment, what the arguments are on each side, and what the difficulties. For if there be fair proofs on the one side, and none at all on the other, and if the most pressing difficulties

difficulties be on that side on which there are no proofs: this is sufficient to render one opinion very credible, and the other altogether incredible. SERM. I.

These two things therefore I shall endeavour to make good, in the matter that is now under our consideration. First, that there are fair proofs on our side, and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of; but that there is no pretence of proof on the other. And secondly, that the side on which there is no proof is incumbred with the greatest difficulties.

First, that there are fair proofs on our side, and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of; but that there is no pretence of proof on the other.

This question, "whether the world was created and "had a beginning, or not?" is a question concerning an ancient matter of fact, which can only be decided these two ways; by testimony, and by probabilities of reason. Testimony, is the principal argument in a matter of this nature, and if fair probabilities of reason concur with it this argument hath all the strength it can have: now both these are clearly on the affirmative side of the question, viz. that the world was created, and had a beginning.

1. Testimony; of which there be two kinds, divine, and human.

Divine testimony, as such, is not proper to be used in this cause, considering the occasion of the present debate: for that would be to beg the first and main question now in controversy, which is, whether there be a God or not? which a testimony from God does suppose, and therefore ought not to be brought for the proof of it. 'Tis true indeed that those effects

1.

SERM. I.

of divine power, I mean miracles, which will prove a divine testimony to an infidel, will as well prove the being of a GOD to an atheist; but when we dispute against those who deny a GOD, no testimony ought to be presumed to be from GOD, but must be proved to be so. And whatever argument proves that will also prove that there is a GOD.

Human testimonies are of two sorts; universal tradition, and written history. Both these are plainly and beyond dispute on our side.

First, there is an universal tradition concerning the beginning of the world, and that it was made by GOD. And for the evidence of this we have the concurring tradition of the most ancient nations, the Egyptians and Phœnicians*; and of the most barbarous the Indians; who, as Strabo † tells us, "did in ma-"ny things agree with the Grecians," particularly in this, "that the world did begin, and should have an "end; and that GOD, the maker and governor of it, "is present in all parts of it." And Acosta tells us, that at the first discovery of America, the inhabitants of Peru did worship one chief GOD, under the name or title of the maker of the universe: and yet these people had not had any commerce with the other known parts of the world, for GOD knows how many ages.

To which may be added, that the most ancient of the philosophers, and those that were the heads of the chiefs Sects of philosophy, as Thales, Anaxagoras and Pythagoras, did likewise consent to this tradition. Particularly concerning Thales, Tully § tells

* Vid. Grot. de verit. chr. relig. l. 1. † Geograph. l. 15.

§ De nat. deorum l. 1.

us, that he was "the first" of all the philosophers "that "enquired into these things, and he said, that water "was the beginning of all things, and that GOD was "that mind, (or intelligent principle) which fashioned "all things out of water." So likewise Strabo *informs us that the Brachmans, the chief sect of philosophers among the Indians, agreed with the Grecians in this, "that the world was made of water." Which agrees exactly with Moses's account of the creation, viz. "that the spirit of GOD moved upon the face of "the waters;" which St. Peter expresses thus, "that "by the word of GOD the heavens and the earth (for so the Hebrews call the world) "were of old ἐξ "ὕδατος καὶ συνεστῶσα constituted or made of water; not "standing out of the water," as our translation renders it. SERM. I. 2 Pet. iii. 5.

Nay Aristole † himself, who was the great asserter of the eternity of the world, gives this account why the gods were anciently represented by the heathens as swearing by the lake Styx, because "water" was supposed to be the "principle of all things." And this, he tells us, was the "most ancient opinion" concerning the original of the world; and that the "very "oldest writers of theology," and those who lived "at "the greatest distance from his time," were of this mind. And in the book *de Mundo* ‖ it is freely acknowledged to have been an ancient saying, and a general tradition among all men, "that all things are of GOD, "and were made by him." I will conclude this with that full testimony of Maximus Tyrius § to this pur-

* Geogr. l. 15. † Metaph. l. 1. c. 3. ‖ Cap. 6.
§ Dissertat. 1.

SERM. I.

pose: "However (says he) men may differ in other "things, yet they all agree in this law or principle, "that there is one GOD, king and father of all things, "&c. This the Greeks say, this the Barbarians; this "those that live upon the continent, and those that "dwell by the sea; the wise and the unwise."

Secondly, we have likewise a most ancient and credible history of the beginning of the world; I mean the history of Moses, with which no book in the world in point of antiquity can contend. I shall not now go about to strengthen my argument, by pleading the divine authority of this book; for which yet I could offer good evidence, if that were proper to the matter in hand. It is sufficient to my present purpose that Moses have the ordinary credit of an historian given him, which none in reason can deny him, he being cited by the most ancient of the heathen historians, and the antiquity of his writings never questioned by any of them, as Josephus * assures us.

Now this history of Moses gives us a particular account of the beginning of the world, and of the creation of it by GOD. Which assertion of his is agreeable to the most ancient writers among the heathen, whether poets or historians. And several of the main parts of Moses's history, as concerning the flood, and the first fathers of the several nations of the world (of which he gives a particular account, Gen. x.) do very well accord with the most ancient accounts of prophane history. And I do not know, whether any thing ought more to recommend the writings of Moses to a human belief, than the easy

* L. 1. contra Appion.

and

and credible account which he gives of the original of the world, and of the firſt peopling of it. SERM. I.

As to the account of ancient times, both the Egyptian and Chaldean accounts, which are pretended by ſome to be ſo vaſtly different from that of the ſcriptures, may for all that be, near the matter, eaſily reconciled with it *; if we do but admit what Diodorus Siculus, and Plutarch, very credible perſons, and diligent ſearchers into ancient books, do moſt expreſly aſſure us, viz. that both thoſe nations did anciently reckon months for years. And the account of the Chineſes is not hard to be reconciled with that of the Septuagint. Now in ſo nice and obſcure a matter, as the account of ancient times is, it ought to ſatisfy any fair and reaſonable enquirer if they can be brought any whit near one another.

So that univerſal tradition and the moſt ancient hiſtory in the world are clearly on our ſide. And if they be, one can hardly wiſh a more convincing argument. For if the world and conſequently mankind had a beginning, there is all the reaſon in the world to expect theſe two things: firſt, that there ſhould be an univerſal tradition, concerning this matter; becauſe it was the moſt memorable thing that could be tranſmitted to poſterity. And this was eaſy to be done, if mankind ſprang from one common root and original, from whence this tradition would naturally be univerſally diffuſed. Secondly, it may with the ſame reaſon be expected, that ſo remarkable a thing ſhould be recorded in the moſt ancient hiſtory. Now both theſe have accordingly happened. But

* Vid. Dr. Stillingfleet's Orig. Sac. where this is fully made out.

then

SERM. I. then on the other hand, if the world was eternal and had no beginning, there could be no real ground for such a tradition or history. And if such a tradition were at any time endeavoured to be set on foot, it is not easy to imagine how it should at first gain entertainment, but much more difficult to conceive how ever it should come to be universally propagated. For upon the supposition of those who hold the eternity of the world, the world was always peopled; and if so, there could be no common head or spring from whence such a tradition would naturally derive itself into all parts of the world. So that unless all the world was sometime of one language, and under one government (which it never was that we know of since it was peopled) no endeavour and industry could make such a tradition common.

If it be said, that this tradition began after some universal deluge, out of which possibly but one family might escape, and that possibly too of barbarous people; from whom any fond and groundless conceit might spring, and afterwards spread it self as mankind encreased. This I shall have occasion to consider in a more proper place. In the mean time I have shewn, even from the acknowledgment of Aristotle himself, that there was anciently such a tradition concerning the beginning of the world. Nay, if we may believe him, he himself was the very first asserter of the eternity of the world. For he * says expressly, "that all the philosophers that were before "him, did hold that the world was made." Thus much for the first kind of proof this matter is capable of, namely, testimony.

* De cœlo. l. 1. c. 10.

2dly,

2dly, The probabilities of reason do all likewise favour the beginning of the world: as SERM. I.

1. The want of any history or tradition ancienter than what is consistent with the received opinion of the time of the world's beginning; nay, the most ancient histories were written long after that time. This Lucretius, the famous Epicurean, urgeth as a strong presumption that the world had a beginning

——Si nulla fuit genitalis origo
Terrarum & cœli, semperque æterna fuere:
Cur supra bellum Thebanum, & funera Trojæ,
Non alias alii quoque res cecinere Poetæ?

i. e. "If the world had no beginning, how is it that the "Greek poets (the most ancient of their writers) men- "tion nothing higher than the Theban war, and the "destruction of Troy?" Were there from all eternity no memorable actions done till about that time? Or had mankind no way till of late to record them and propagate the memory of them to posterity? It is much, if men were from eternity, that they should not find out the way of writing in all that long duration, which had past before that time. Sure he was a fortunate man indeed, who after men had been eternally so dull as not to find it out, had the luck at last to hit upon it.

But it may be, the famous actions of former times were always recorded, but that the memorials of them have been several times lost by universal deluges, which have now and then happened and swept all away, except (it may be) two or three persons, that have escaped and begun the world again upon a new score. This is the only refuge that the atheist hath

to

SERM. I.

to fly to, when he is prest with this and the like arguments. But he cannot possibly escape this way. For these universal inundations must either be natural or supernatural. If they be supernatural, as (any man that considers well the frame of the world, and how hard it is to give a natural reason of them, would be inclined to think) then indeed it is easy to conceive how a few of mankind, and no more, should escape: because this will depend upon the pleasure of that superior being which is supposed supernaturally to order these things. But this is to yield what we have all this while contended for, viz. That there is a GOD. But if they be natural, which the atheist must say, then there is nothing to restrain them from a total destruction, not only of mankind, but of all the beasts of the earth. This the atheist cannot deny, not only to be very possible, but exceeding probable; because he grants it to have come so near the matter, that but very few escaped, and no doubt with great difficulty. Now it is the greatest wonder in the world, that a thing (according to their own supposition) so likely to happen, should never have fallen out in an infinite duration. Will any man have the face to say that a thing is likely which did never yet happen from all eternity? One would think that not only whatever is probable, but whatever can possibly happen, should be brought about in that space: so that if mankind had been from eternity it had in all probability, I had almost said, been destroyed from all eternity, but I may confidently say, long since ruined.

2. Another probability of the world's beginning is, the account which we have of the original of learning and the most useful arts in several parts of the world.

Now

Now if the world had been eternal, these in all likelihood would have been found out, and generally spread long ago and beyond the memory of all ages. There are some arts indeed that are peculiarly convenient to some particular nations; and others that are only serviceable to the humour and fashion of one or more ages. These are not likely to spread, and they may come in, and go out, and return again as often as there is occasion. But those which are generally useful to mankind in all times and places, if they were once found out (and who would not think they should in an eternal duration?) it is not imaginable but that they should have been spread innumerable ages since: nor can any man give a good reason how they should ever be lost, but by some such accident as an universal deluge, which has been spoken to already. But now on the contrary, the beginnings of learning and of the most useful arts in several nations, is very well known. And I add farther, that where-ever learning and civil arts have come, this tradition concerning the beginning of the world hath been most vigorous, and asserted with the greatest clearness and confidence. SERM. I.

3. The several parts of which the world consists, being (so far as by those parts of it which we know, we can possibly judge of the rest) in their nature corruptible; it is more than probable, that in an infinite duration this frame of things would long since have been dissolved; especially, if (as the atheist affirms) there be no superior being, no wise and intelligent principle to repair and regulate it, and to prevent those innumerable disorders and calamitous accidents, which must in so long a space in all probability have

SERM. I.

happened to it. This Lucretius * also urges as a convincing proof that the world was not eternal.

Quare etiam nativa necesse est confiteare
Hæc eadem ; neque enim mortali corpore quæ sunt
Ex infinito jam tempore adhuc potuissent
Immensi validas ævi contemnere vires.

" It must necessarily (says he) be acknowledged " that the world had a beginning ; otherwise those " things which are in their own nature corruptible " had never been able, from all eternity, to have held " out against those forcible and violent assaults which " in an infinite duration must have happened." Nay thus much Aristotle himself every where grants, that if the frame of the world be liable to dissolution, it must of necessity be acknowledged to have had a beginning.

These are some of the chief probabilities on our side ; which being taken together, and in their united force, have a great deal of conviction in them. Especially if this be added, that there is no kind of positive proof so much as pretended on the other side. The utmost that Aristotle pretends to prove, is that the world proceeded from God by the way of a natural and necessary effect, as light does from the sun. Which if it be true (as there is no tolerable ground for it) the world indeed would be without beginning, but not of it self. And thus I have done with the first consideration I propounded to speak to, viz. " That there are fair proofs on our side, and as con- " vincing as the nature of the thing is capable of ; but " that there is no pretence or proof on the other." I proceed therefore to the

* L. 5. Second

Second consideration, "that the most pressing dif- SERM.
"ficulties are on that side on which there is no proof." I.

Those who deny a GOD, and hold the world to have been eternal and of it self, have only two things to object against us: the difficulties that there are in the "notion of a GOD, and in making the world of "nothing." To the first I answer: that we attribute nothing to GOD that hath any repugnancy or contradiction in it. Power, wisdom, goodness, justice and truth, have no repugnancy in them to our reason; because we own these Perfections to be in some degree in our selves; and therefore they may be in the highest degree that is possible in another. The eternity of GOD and his immensity, and his being of himself, how difficult soever they may be to be conceived, yet these perfections must be granted to be somewhere; and therefore they may as well, nay much better, be ascribed to GOD, in whom we suppose all other perfections to meet, than to any thing else. And as for GOD's being a spirit, whatever difficulty there may be in conceiving the notion of a spirit, yet the atheist must grant the thing, that there is a being or principle really distinct from matter; or else shew how mere matter, which is confessed by themselves to be void of sense and understanding, and to move necessarily, can produce any thing that has sense, understanding and liberty. As to the other difficulty, "of making the world of nothing," I shall only say this: that though it signify an inconceivable excess of power, yet there can no contradiction be shewn in it. And it is every whit as easy to conceive that something should be caused to be that was not before, as that any thing should be of it self;

SERM. I.

which yet must be granted on both sides; and therefore this difficulty ought not to be objected by either.

But then on the other side there are these two great and real difficulties. First, that men generally have always believed the contrary, viz. That the world had a beginning, and was made by GOD. Which is a strong evidence that this account of the existence of the world is more natural, and of a more easy conception to human understanding. And indeed it is very natural to conceive that every thing which is imperfect (as the world and all the creatures in it must be acknowledged in many respects to be) had some cause which produced it, such as it is, and determined the bounds and limits of it's perfection: but that which is of it self and without a cause, may be any thing, and have any perfection which does not imply a contradiction. Secondly, to assert mankind to have been of it self, and without a cause, hath this invincible objection against it; that we plainly see every man to be from another. So that mankind is asserted to have no cause of it's being, and yet every particular man must be acknowledged to have a father; which is every whit as absurd in an infinite succession of men, as in any finite number of generations. It is more easy indeed to conceive how a constant and permanent being, suppose matter, should always have been of it self; and then that that should be the foundation of infinite successive changes and alterations: but an infinite succession of the generations of men without any permanent foundation, is utterly unimaginable. If it be said that the earth was always, and in time did produce men, and that they ever since have produced one another; this

this is to run into one great absurdity of the Epicurean way, which shall be considered in it's proper place. SERM. I.

And thus I have endeavoured, as plainly and briefly as the nature of the argument would admit, to prove that the account which the scripture gives of the existence of the world, is most credible, and agreeable to the reason of mankind; and that this first account which the atheist gives of it, is altogether incredible. And now I expect after all this the atheist will complain, that all that hath been said does not amount to a strict demonstration of the thing. It may be so. And if the atheist would undertake to demonstrate the contrary, there might be some reason for this complaint. In the mean time I desire to know whether when both sides are agreed that the world is, and that it must either have it's original from God, or have been always of it self; and if it have been made evident, that on one side there are fair proofs both from testimony and reason, and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of, and no pretence of proof on the other; and that the difficulties are most pressing on that side which is destitute of proof; I say, if this have been made evident, I desire to know whether this be not upon the matter as satisfactory to a wise man as a demonstration? For in this case there can be no doubt on which side the clear advantage of evidence lies, and consequently which way a prudent man ought to determine assent.

I come now in the second place, to consider the other account which another sort of atheists, those whom I call the Epicurean, do give of the existence

SERM. I. of the world. And 'tis this. They suppose the matter of which the world is constituted to be eternal and of it self, and then an infinite empty space for the infinite little parts of this matter (which they call atoms) to move and play in; and that these being always in motion did after infinite trials and encounters, without any counsel or design, and without the disposal and contrivance of any wise and intelligent being, at last by a lucky casualty entangle and settle themselves in this beautiful and regular frame of the world which we now see. And that the earth, being at first in it's full vigour and fruitfulness, did then bring forth men and all other sorts of living creatures as it does plants now.

This is in short the Epicurean account of the original of the world, which, as absurd as it is, Lucretius * hath very elegantly expressed in these verses.

Sed quibus ille modis conjectus materiai,
Fundârit cœlum ac terram, pontique profunda,
Solisque & lunæ cursus, ex ordine ponam.
Nam certè neque consilio primordia rerum
Ordine se quæque, atque sagaci mente locârunt;
Nec quos quæque darent motus, pepigere profecto:
Sed quia multa modis multis primordia rerum
Ex infinito jam tempore percita plagis
Ponderibusque suis consuerunt concita ferri,
Omnimodisque coire, atque omnia pertentare,
Quæcunque inter se possent congressa creare:
Propterea fit, uti magnum vulgata per ævum
Omnigenos cœtus, & motus experiundo,
Tandem ea conveniant, quæ ut convenere, repente

* L. 5.

Magnarum

Thus he like a good poet, but a very bad maker and contriver of the world. For I appeal to any man of reason whether any thing can be more unreasonable, than obstinately to impute an effect to chance which carries, in the very face of it, all the arguments and characters of a wise design, and contrivance? Was ever any considerable work, in which there was required a great variety of parts, and a regular and orderly disposition of those parts, done by chance? Will chance fit means to ends, and that in ten thousand instances, and not fail in any one? How often might a man after he had jumbled a set of letters in a bag, fling them out upon the ground before they would fall into an exact poem, yea or so much as make a good discourse in prose? And may not a little book be as easily made by chance, as this great volume of the world? How long might a man be in sprinkling colours upon canvas with a careless hand, before they would happen to make the exact picture of a man? And is a man easier made by chance than his picture? How long might twenty thousand blind men, which should be sent out from the several remote parts of England, wander up and down before they would all meet upon Salisbury plains and fall into rank and file in the exact order of an army? And yet this is much more easy to be imagined, than how the innumerable blind parts of matter should rendezvous themselves into a world. A man that sees Henry the seventh's chapel at Westminster might with as good reason maintain (yea with much

SERM. I.

much better, considering the vast difference betwixt that little structure and the huge fabrick of the world) that it was never contrived or built by any man, but that the stones did by chance grow into those curious figures into which they seem to have been cut and graven; and that upon a time (as tales usually begin) the materials of that building, the stone, mortar, timber, iron, lead and glass, happily met together and very fortunately ranged themselves into that delicate order in which we see them now, so close compacted that it must be a very great chance that parts them again. What would the world think of a man that should advance such an opinion as this, and write a book for it? If they would do him right, they ought to look upon him as mad: but yet with a little more reason than any man can have to say that the world was made by chance: or that the first men grew up out of the earth as plants do now. For can any thing be more ridiculous and against all reason, than to ascribe the production of men to the first fruitfulness of the earth, without so much as one instance and experiment in any age or history to countenance so monstrous a supposition? The thing is at first-sight so gross and palpable, that no discourse about it can make it more apparent. And yet these shameful beggars of principles, who give this precarious account of the original of things, assume to themselves to be the men of reason, the great wits of the world, the only cautious and wary persons that hate to be imposed upon, that must have convincing evidence for every thing, and can admit of nothing without a clear demonstration for it.

II. Specu-

SERM. I.

II. Speculative atheism is unreasonable, because it gives no reasonable account of the universal consent of mankind in this apprehension, that there is a GOD. That men do generally believe a GOD, and have done in all ages, the present experience of the world, and the records of former times do abundantly testify. Now how comes this persuasion to have gained so universal a possession of the mind of man, and to have found such general entertainment in all nations, even those that are most barbarous? If there be no such thing as GOD in the world, how comes it to pass that this object doth continually encounter our understandings? Whence is it that we are so perpetually haunted with the apparition of a deity, and followed with it wherever we go? If it be not natural to the mind of man, but proceeds from some accidental distemper of our understandings, how comes it to be so universal that no differences of age, or temper, or education can wear it out, and set any considerable number of men free from it? Into what can we resolve this strong inclination of mankind to this error and mistake? How come all nations to be thus seduced? It is altogether unimaginable but that the reason of so universal a consent in all places and ages of the world, and among all differences of persons, should be one and constant. But no one and constant reason of this can be given, but from the nature of man's mind and understanding, which hath this notion of a deity born with it and stamped upon it; or which is all one, is of such a frame that in the free use and exercise of itself it will find out GOD: and what more reasonable than to think, that if we be GOD's workmanship he should set this mark of him-

SERM. I. self upon all reasonable creatures, that they may know to whom they belong, and may acknowledge the author of their beings? This seems to be a credible and satisfactory account of so universal a consent in this matter. But now what doth the atheist resolve this into? He is not at one with himself what account to give of it, nor can it be expected he should. For he that will over-look the true reason of a thing, which usually is but one, may easily find many false ones, error being infinite. But there are three which he principally relies upon, fear, tradition, and policy of state. I shall briefly consider these.

First, he would make us believe that this apprehension of a God doth spring from an infinite jealousy in the mind of man, and an endless fear of the worst that may happen; according to that divine saying of the poet, which he can never sufficiently admire,

Primum in orbe deos fecit timor, ——

"Fear first made gods." So that it is granted on both sides that the fear of a deity doth universally possess the minds of men. Now the question is, whether it be more likely that the existence of a God should be the cause of this fear, or that this fear should be the cause why men imagine there is a God? If there be a God, who hath impressed this image of himself upon the mind of man, there's great reason why all men should stand in awe of him: but if there be no God, it is not easy to conceive how fear should create an universal confidence and assurance in men that there is one. For, whence should this fear come? It must be either from without, from the suggestion of others who first tell us there is such a being, and then

our fear believes it; or else it must arise from within, from the nature of man which is apt to fancy dreadful and terrible things. If from the suggestion of others who tell us so, the question returns, who told them so? and will never be satisfied till the first author of this report be found out. So that this account of fear resolves it self into tradition, which shall be spoken to in it's proper place. But if it be said that this fear ariseth from within, from the nature of man which is apt to imagine dreadful things, this likewise is liable to inexplicable difficulties. For, first, the proper object of fear is something that is dreadful, that is, something that threatens men with harm or danger; and that in GOD must either be power or justice; and such an object as this fear indeed may create: but goodness and mercy are essential to the notion of a GOD as well as power and justice: now how should fear put men upon fancying a being that is infinitely good and merciful? No man hath reason to be afraid of such a being, as such. So that the atheist must join another cause to fear, viz. hope, to enable men to create this imagination of a GOD. And what would the product of these two contrary passions be? The imagination of a being which we should fear would do us as much harm as we could hope it would do us good; which would be *quid pro quo*, and which our reason would oblige us to lay aside so soon as we have fancied it, because it would signify just nothing. But, secondly, suppose fear alone could do it; how comes the mind of man to be subject to such groundless and unreasonable fears? The Aristotelian atheist will say, it always was so; but this is to affirm, and not to give any account of a thing. The Epicurean

SERM. I.

atheist, if he will speak consonantly to himself, must say that there happened in the original constitution of the first men such a contexture of atoms as do naturally dispose men to these panick fears; unless he will say that the first men, when they grew out of the earth and afterwards broke loose from their root, finding themselves weak and naked and unarmed, and meeting with several fierce creatures stronger than themselves, they were put in such a fright as did a little distemper their understandings, and let loose their imaginations to endless suspicions and unbounded jealousies, which did at last settle in the conceit of an invisible being infinitely powerful and able to do them harm; and being fully possest with this apprehension (nothing being more ordinary than for crazed persons to believe their own fancies) they became religious; and afterwards when mankind began to be propagated in the way of generation, then religion obliged them to instil these principles into their children in their tender years, that so they might make the greater impression upon them; and this course having been continued ever since the notion of a God hath been kept up in the world. This is very suitable to Epicurus his hypothesis of the original of men; but if any man think fit to say thus I cannot think it fit to confute him. Thirdly, whether men were from all eternity such timorous and fanciful creatures, or happened to be made so in the first constitution of things, it seems however that this fear of a deity hath a foundation in nature. And if it be natural, ought we not rather to conclude that there is some ground and reason for these fears, and that nature hath not planted them in us to no purpose, than that they

they are vain and groundleſs? There is no principle that Ariſtotle (the great aſſertor of the eternity of the world) doth more frequently inculcate than this, "that nature doth nothing in vain;" and the atheiſt himſelf is forced to acknowledge (and ſo every man muſt who attentively conſiders the frame of the world) that although things were made by chance, yet they have happened as well as if the greateſt wiſdom had the ordering and contriving of them. And ſurely wiſdom would never have planted ſuch a vain principle as the fear of a deity in the nature of man, if there had not been a GOD in the world.

Secondly, if fear be not a ſufficient account of this univerſal conſent, the atheiſt thinks it may very probably be reſolved into univerſal tradition. But this likewiſe is liable to great exception. For, whence came this tradition? It muſt begin ſome time, it muſt have it's original from ſome body; and it were very well worth our knowing who that man was that firſt raiſed this ſpirit which all the reaſon of mankind could never conjure down ſince. Where did he live, and when? In what country, and in what age of the world? What was his name, or his ſon's name, that we may know him? This the atheiſt can give no punctual account of: only he imagines it not improbable that ſome body long ago (no body knows when) beyond the memory of all ages did ſtart ſuch a notion in the world, and that it hath paſt for current ever ſince. But if this tradition be granted ſo very ancient as to have been before all books, and to be elder than any hiſtory, it may for any thing any body can tell have been from the beginning; and then it is much more likely to be a notion which was bred in the

SERM. I.

the mind of man and born with him, than a tradition tranſmitted from hand to hand through all generations; eſpecially if we conſider how many rude and barbarous nations there are in the world which conſent in the opinion of a GOD, and yet have ſcarce any certain tradition of any thing that was done among them but two or three ages before.

Thirdly, but if neither of theſe be ſatisfactory, he hath one way more; which although it ſignify little to men of ſober and ſevere reaſon, yet it very unhappily hits the jealous and ſuſpicious humour of the generality of men, who from the experience they have had of themſelves and others are very apt to ſuſpect that every body, but eſpecially their ſuperiors and governors, have a deſign to impoſe upon them for their own ends. In ſhort, it is this: that this noiſe about a GOD is a mere ſtate-engine and a politick device, invented at firſt by ſome great prince or miniſter of ſtate, to keep people in awe and order. And if ſo, from hence (ſaith the atheiſt) we may eaſily apprehend how from ſuch an original it might be generally propagated and become univerſally current, having the ſtamp of publick authority upon it. Beſides, that people have always been found eaſy to comply with the inclinations of their prince. And from hence likewiſe we may ſee the reaſon why this notion hath continued ſo long. For being found by experience to be ſo excellent an inſtrument of government we may be ſure it would always be cheriſhed and kept up.

And now he triumphs, and thinks the buſineſs is very clear: thus it was, ſome time or other, (moſt probably towards the beginning of the world, if it had

had a beginning, when all mankind was under one universal monarch) ſome great Nebuchadnezzar ſet up this image of a deity, and commanded "all people and nations to fall down and worſhip it:" and this being found a ſucceſsful device to awe people into obedience to government it hath been continued to this day, and is like to laſt to the end of the world. To this fine conjecture I have theſe four things to ſay: SERM. I.

1. That all this is mere conjecture and ſuppoſition; he cannot bring the leaſt ſhadow of proof or evidence for any one tittle of it.

2. This ſuppoſition grants the opinion of a GOD to conduce very much to the ſupport of government and order in the world; and conſequently to be very beneficial to mankind. So that the atheiſt cannot but acknowledge that it is great pity that it ſhould not be true, and that it is the common intereſt of mankind, if there were but probable arguments for it, not to admit of any ſlight reaſons againſt it; and to puniſh all thoſe who would ſeduce men to atheiſm, as the great diſturbers of the world and peſts of human ſociety.

3. This ſuppoſition can have nothing of certainty in it unleſs this be true, "that whoever makes a "politick advantage of other mens principles ought, "to be preſumed to contrive thoſe principles into "them." Whereas it is much more common (becauſe more eaſy) for men to ſerve their own ends of thoſe principles or opinions which they do not put into men, but find there. So that if the queſtion of a GOD were to be decided by the probability of this conjecture, (which the atheiſt applauds himſelf moſt in) it would be concluded in the affirmative; it being

SERM. I.

ing much more likely, ſince politicians reap the advantages of obedience and a more ready ſubmiſſion to government from men's believing that there is a GOD, that they found the minds of men prepoſſeſſed to their hands with the notion of a GOD, than that they planted it there.

4. We have as much evidence of the contrary to this ſuppoſition as ſuch a thing is capable of, viz. that it was not an *arcanum imperii*, a "ſecret of government" to propagate the belief of a GOD among the people when the governors themſelves knew it to be a cheat. For we find in the hiſtories of all ages of which we have any records, (and of other ages we cannot poſſibly judge) that princes have not been more ſecure from troubles of conſcience and the fears of religion and the terrors of another world, (nay many of them more ſubject to theſe) than other men, as I could give many inſtances, and thoſe no mean ones: what made Caligula creep under the bed when it thunder'd? What made Tiberius, that great maſter of the crafts of government, complain ſo much of the grievous ſtings and laſhes he felt in his conſcience? What made cardinal Wolſey (that great miniſter of ſtate in our own nation) to pour forth his ſoul in thoſe ſad words, "had I been as diligent "to pleaſe my GOD as I have been to pleaſe my king, "he would not have forſaken me now in my gray "hairs?" What reaſon for ſuch actions and ſpeeches, if theſe great men had known that religion was but a cheat? But if they knew nothing of this ſecret, I think we may ſafely conclude that the notion of a GOD did not come from the court, that it was not the invention of politicians and a juggle of ſtate to cozen the people into obedience. And

SERM. I.

And now from all this that hath been said it seems to be very evident, that the general consent of mankind in this apprehension that there is a God must in all reason be ascribed to some more certain and universal cause than fear, or tradition, or state-policy, viz. to this, that God himself hath wrought this image of himself upon the mind of man, and so woven it into the very frame of his being, that (like Phidias his picture in Minerva's shield) it can never totally be defaced without the ruin of human nature.

I know but one objection that this discourse is liable to, which is this; that the universal consent of mankind in the apprehension of a God is no more an argument that he really is, than the general agreement of so many nations for so many ages in the worship of many gods is an argument that there are many.

To this I answer, 1. That the generality of the philosophers and wise men of all nations and ages, did dissent from the multitude in these things. They believed but one supreme deity, which with respect to the various benefits men received from him had several titles bestowed upon him. And although they did servilely comply with the people in worshipping God, by sensible images and representations, yet it appears by their writings that they despised this way of worship as superstitious, and unsuitable to the nature of God. So that Polytheism and idolatry are far from being able to pretend to universal consent, from their having had the vote of the multude in most nations for several ages together. Because the opinion of the vulgar, separated from the consent and approbation of the wise, signifies no more

1.

than a great many cyphers would do without figures.

2. The groſs ignorance and miſtakes of the heathen about GOD and his worſhip are a good argument that there is a GOD; becauſe they ſhew that men ſunk into the moſt degenerate condition, into the greateſt blindneſs and darkneſs imaginable, do yet retain ſome ſenſe and awe of a deity; that religion is a property of our natures, and that the notion of a deity is intimate to our underſtandings and ſticks cloſe to them, ſeeing men will rather have any GOD than none; and rather than want a deity they will worſhip any thing.

3. That there have been ſo many falſe gods deviſed, is rather an argument that there is a true one than that there is none. There would be no counterfeits but for the ſake of ſomething that is real. For though all pretenders ſeem to be what they really are not, yet they pretend to be ſomething that really is. For to counterfeit is to put on the likeneſs and appearance of ſome real excellence. There would be no braſs-money if there were not good and lawful money. Briſtol-ſtones would not pretend to be diamonds, if there never had been any diamonds. Thoſe idols in Henry the ſeventh's time, (as Sir Francis Bacon calls them) Lambert Simnell and Perkin Warbeck, had never been ſet up, if there had not once been a real Plantagenet and duke of York. So the idols of the heathen, though they be ſet up in affront to the true GOD, yet they rather prove that there is one than the contrary.

III. Speculative atheiſm is abſurd, becauſe it requires more evidence for things than they are capable of. Ariſtotle hath long ſince well obſerved, how unreaſonable it is to expect the ſame kind of proof and evidence

evidence for every thing, which we have for ſome things. Mathematical things, being of an abſtracted nature, are capable of the cleareſt and ſtricteſt demonſtration: but concluſions in natural philoſophy are capable of proof by an induction of experiments; things of a moral nature by moral arguments; and matters of fact by credible teſtimony. And though none of theſe be capable of that ſtrict kind of demonſtration, which mathematical matters are; yet have we an undoubted aſſurance of them, when they are proved by the beſt arguments that things of that kind will bear. No man can demonſtrate to me (unleſs we will call every argument that is fit to convince a wiſe man a demonſtration) that there is ſuch an iſland in America as Jamaica. Yet upon the teſtimony of credible perſons who have ſeen it, and authors who have written of it, I am as free from all doubt concerning it, as I am from doubting of the cleareſt mathematical demonſtration. So that this is to be entertained as a firm principle by all thoſe who pretend to be certain of any thing at all: "that when any "thing in any of theſe kinds, is proved by as good "arguments as a thing of that kind is capable of, and "we have as great aſſurance that it is, as we could poſ-"ſibly have ſuppoſing it were, we ought not in rea-"ſon to make any doubt of the exiſtence of that "thing."

Now to apply this to the preſent caſe. The being of a GOD is not mathematically demonſtrable, nor can it be expected it ſhould, becauſe only mathematical matters admit of this kind of evidence. Nor can it be proved immediately by ſenſe, becauſe GOD being ſuppoſed to be a pure ſpirit cannot be the ob-

SERM. I.

ject of any corporeal sense. But yet we have as great assurance that there is a GOD as the nature of the thing to be proved is capable of; and as we could in reason expect to have, supposing that he were. For let us suppose there were such a being as an infinite spirit, clothed with all possible perfection, that is, as good and wise and powerful, &c. as can be imagined: what conceivable ways are there whereby we should come to be assured that there is such a being? but either by an internal impression of the notion of a GOD upon our minds; or else by such external and visible effects as our reason tells us must be attributed to some cause, and which we cannot without great violence to our understandings attribute to any other cause but such a being as we conceive GOD to be, that is, one that is infinitely good, and wise, and powerful? Now we have this double assurance that there is a GOD, and greater or other than this the thing is not capable of: if GOD should assume a body and present himself before our eyes, this might amaze us but could not give us any rational assurance that there is an infinite spirit. If he should work a miracle; this could not in reason convince an atheist more than the arguments he already hath for it. If the atheist then were to "ask a sign in the heaven above, or "in the earth beneath," what could he desire GOD to do for his conviction more than he hath already done? Could he desire him to work a greater miracle than to make a world? Why, if GOD should carry this perverse man out of the limits of this world, and shew him a new heaven and a new earth, springing out of nothing, he might say that innumerable parts of matter chanced just then to rally together and to form

form themselves into this new world, and that GOD did not make it. Thus you see that we have all the rational assurance of a GOD that the thing is capable of, and that atheism is absurd and unreasonable in requiring more. SERM. I.

IV. The atheist is unreasonable, because he pretends to know that which no man can know, and to be certain of that which no body can be certain of; that is, that there is no GOD, and which is consequent upon this (as I shall shew afterwards) that it is not possible there should be one. And the atheist must pretend to know this certainly. For it were the greatest folly in the world for a man to deny and despise a GOD, if he be not certain that he is not. Now whoever pretends to be certain that there is no GOD hath this great disadvantage, he pretends to be certain of a pure negative. But of negatives we have far the least certainty, and they are usually hardest, and many times impossible to be proved. Indeed such negatives as only deny some particular mode or manner of a thing's existence, a man may have a certainty of them; because when we see things to be, we may see what they are, and in what manner they do or do not exist. For instance, we may be certain that man is not a creature that hath wings, because this only concerns the manner of his existence; and we seeing what he is, may certainly know that he is not so, or so. But pure negatives, that is, such as absolutely deny the existence of things, or the possibility of their existence, can never be proved; for after all that can be said against a thing, this will still be true, that many things possibly are which we know not of, and that many more things may be than are; and if so, after all our

argu-

SERM. I.

arguments against a thing it will be uncertain whether it be or not. And this is universally true, unless the thing denied to be do plainly imply a contradiction; from which I have already shewn the notion of a God to be free. Now the atheist pretends to be certain of a pure negative, that there is no such being as God, and that it is not possible there should be: but no man can reasonably pretend to know thus much, but he must pretend to know all things that are or can be; which if any man should be so vain as to pretend to, yet it is to be hoped that no body would be so weak as to believe him.

V. Speculative atheism is unreasonable, because it contradicts it self. There is this great contradiction in the denial of a God: He that denies a God, says that that is impossible which yet must be granted to be possible. He says it is impossible that there should be such a being as God, in saying that *de facto* there is no such being. For eternity being essential to the notion of a God, if there be not a God already it is impossible now that there should be one; because such a being as is supposed to be essentially eternal and without beginning cannot now begin to be. And yet he must grant it possible that there should be such a being, because it is possible there should be such a being as hath all possible perfection: and such a being as this is that which we call God, and is that very thing which the atheist denies and others affirm to be. For he that denies a God, must deny such a being as all the world describe God to be; and this is the general notion which all men have of God, "that "he is a being as perfect as is possible;" that is, endued with all such perfections as do not imply a contradiction,

tradiction, which none of those perfections which we attribute to GOD do, as I have already proved. SERM. I.

II. Speculative atheism as it is unreasonable, so is it a most imprudent and uncomfortable opinion: and that upon these two accounts. First, because it is against the present interest and happiness of mankind. Secondly, because it is infinitely hazardous and unsafe in the issue.

1. It is against the present interest and happiness of mankind. If atheism were the general opinion of the world, it would be infinitely prejudicial to the peace and happiness of human society, and would open a wide door to all manner of confusion and disorder. But this I shall not now insist upon, because I design a particular discourse of that by it self.

I shall at present content my self to shew how uncomfortable an opinion this would be to particular persons. For nothing can be more evident than that man is not sufficient of himself to his own happiness. He is liable to many evils and miseries which he can neither prevent nor redress. He is full of wants which he cannot supply, and compassed about with infirmities which he cannot remove, and obnoxious to dangers which he can never sufficiently provide against. Consider man without the protection and conduct of a superior being, and he is secure of nothing that he enjoys in this world, and uncertain of every thing that he hopes for. He is apt to grieve for what he cannot help, and eagerly to desire what he is never likely to obtain. "Man walketh in a vain shew, and "disquieteth himself in vain." He courts happiness in a thousand shapes, and the faster he pursues it the faster it flies from him. His hopes and expectations

are

SERM. I.

are bigger than his enjoyments, and his fears and jealousies more troublesom than the evils themselves which he is so much afraid of. He is liable to a great many inconveniencies every moment of his life, and is continually insecure not only of the good things of this life, but even of life it self. And besides all this, after all his endeavours to the contrary, he finds himself naturally to dread a superior being, that can defeat all his designs, and disappoint all his hopes, and make him miserable beyond all his fears. He has oftentimes secret misgivings concerning another life after this, and fearful apprehensions of an invisible judge; and thereupon he is full of anxiety concerning his condition in another world, and sometimes plunged into that anguish and despair that he grows weary of himself. So that the atheist deprives himself of all the comfort that the apprehensions of a God can give a man, and yet is liable to all the trouble and disquiet of those apprehensions.

I do not say that these inconveniencies do happen to all; but every one is in danger of them. For man's nature is evidently so contrived as does plainly discover how unable he is to make himself happy. So that he must necessarily look abroad and seek for happiness somewhere else. And if there be no superior being, in whose care of him he may repose his confidence and quiet his mind; if he have no comfortable expectations of another life to sustain him under the evils and calamities he is liable to in this world, he is certainly "of all creatures the most miserable." There are none of us but may happen to fall into those circumstances of danger, or want, or pain, or some other sort of calamity, that we can have no hopes of relief

relief or comfort but from GOD alone: none in all the world to fly to, but him. And what would men do in such a case if it were not for GOD? Human nature is most certainly liable to desperate exigencies, and he is not happy that is not provided against the worst that may happen. It is bad to be reduced to such a condition as to be destitute of all comfort. And yet men are many times brought to that extremity, that if it were not for GOD they would not know what to do with themselves, or how to enjoy themselves for one hour, or to entertain their thoughts with any comfortable considerations under their present anguish and sufferings. All men naturally fly to GOD in extremity, and the most atheistical person in the world, when he is forsaken of all hopes of any other relief, is forced to acknowledge him, and would be glad to have such a friend. SERM. I.

Can it then be a wise and reasonable design to endeavour to banish the belief of a GOD out of the world? Not to say how impious it is in respect of GOD, nothing can be more malicious to men, and more effectually undermine the only foundation of our happiness. For if there were no GOD in the world man would be in a much more wretched and disconsolate condition, than the creatures below him. For they are only sensible of present pain, and when it is upon them they bear it as they can. But they are not at all apprehensive of evils at a distance, nor tormented with the fearful prospect of what may befal them hereafter: nor are they plunged into despair upon the consideration that the evils they lie under are like to continue, and are incapable of a remedy. And as they have no apprehension of these things,

SERM. I.

so they need no comfort against them. But mankind is liable to all the same evils, and many others; which are so much the greater, because they are aggravated and set on by the restless workings of our minds, and exasperated by the smart reflections and frettings of our own thoughts: and if there be no God we are wholly without comfort under all these, and without any other remedy than what time will give. For if the providence of God be taken away, what security have we against those innumerable dangers and mischiefs to which human nature is continually exposed? What consolation under them, when we are reduced to that condition that no creature can give us any hopes of relief? But if we believe that there is a God that takes care of us, and we be careful to please him, this cannot but be a mighty comfort to us, both under the present sense of affliction, and the apprehension of evils at a distance. For in that case, we are secure of one of these three things. Either that God by his providence will prevent the evils we fear, if that be best for us: or that he will support us under them when they are present, and add to our strength as he encreaseth our burthen: or that he will make them the occasion of a greater good to us, by turning them either to our advantage in this world, or the increase of our happiness in the next. Now every one of these considerations has a great deal of comfort in it, for which if there were no God there could be no ground. Nay, on the contrary, the most real foundation of our unhappiness would be laid in our reason; and we should be so much more miserable than the beasts, by how much we have a quicker apprehension and a deeper consideration of things.

So

So that if a man had arguments sufficient to persuade him that there is no GOD (as there is infinite reason to the contrary) yet the belief of a GOD is so necessary to the comfort and happiness of our lives, that a wise man could not but be heartily troubled to quit so pleasant an error, and to part with a delusion which is apt to yield such unspeakable satisfaction to the mind of man. Did but men consider the true notion of GOD, he would appear to be so lovely a being, and so full of goodness and of all desirable perfections, that even those very persons who are of such irregular understandings as not to believe that there is a GOD, yet could not (if they understood themselves) refrain from wishing with all their hearts that there were one. For is it not really desirable to every man, that there should be such a being in the world as takes care of the frame of it, that it do not run into confusion, and in that disorder ruin mankind? That there should be such a being, as takes particular care of every one of us, and loves us, and delights to do us good; as understands all our wants, and is able and willing to relieve us in our greatest straits, when nothing else can; to preserve us in our greatest dangers, to assist us against our worst enemies, and to comfort us under our sharpest sufferings, when all other things set themselves against us? Is it not every man's interest, that there should be such a governor of the world as really designs our happiness, and hath omitted nothing that is necessary to it; as would govern us for our advantage, and will require nothing of us but what is for our good, and yet will infinitely reward us for the doing of that which is best for our selves? that will punish any man that

should go about to injure us, or to deal otherwise with us than himself in the like case would be dealt withall by us? In a word, such a one as is ready to be reconcil'd to us when we have offended him, and is so far from taking little advantages against us for every failing, that he is willing to pardon our most wilful miscarriages upon our repentance and amendment? And we have reason to believe God to be such a being, if he be at all.

Why then should any man be troubled that there is such a being as this, or think himself concern'd to shut him out of the world? How could such a governor as this be wanting in the world, that is so great a comfort and security to mankind, and "the confi-"dence of all the ends of the earth?" If God be such a being as I have describ'd, wo to the world if it were without him. This would be a thousand times greater loss to mankind and of more dismal consequence, and, if it were true, ought to affect us with more grief and horror than the extinguishing of the sun.

Let but all things be well considered, and I am very confident that if a wise and considerate man were left to himself and his own choice, to wish the greatest good to himself he could devise; after he had searched heaven and earth, the sum of all his wishes would be this, "that there were just such a being as "God is;" nor would he chuse any other benefactor, or friend, or protector for himself, or governor for the whole world, than infinite power conducted and managed by infinite wisdom and goodness and justice, which is the true notion of a God.

Nay, so necessary is God to the happiness of mankind, that though there were no God, yet the atheist himself,

himſelf, upon ſecond thoughts, would judge it convenient that the generality of men ſhould believe that there is one. For when the atheiſt had attained his end, and (if it were a thing poſſible) had blotted the notion of a GOD out of the minds of men, mankind would in all probability grow ſo melancholy and ſo unruly a thing, that he himſelf would think it fit in policy to contribute his beſt endeavours to the reſtoring of men to their former belief. Thus hath GOD ſecured the belief of himſelf in the world, againſt all attempts to the contrary; not only by riveting the notion of himſelf into our natures, but likewiſe by making the belief of his being neceſſary to the peace and tranquillity of our minds, and to the quiet and happineſs of human ſociety. SERM. I.

So that if we conſult our reaſon, we cannot but believe that there is, if our intereſt, we cannot but heartily wiſh that there were ſuch a being as GOD in the world. Every thing within us and without us gives notice of him. His name is written upon our hearts; and in every creature there are ſome prints and footſteps of him. Every moment we feel our dependance upon him, and do by daily experience find that we can neither be happy without him, nor think our ſelves ſo.

I confeſs, it is not a wicked man's intereſt, if he reſolve to continue ſuch, that there ſhould be a GOD; but then it is not mens intereſt to be wicked. It is for the general good of human ſociety, and conſequently of particular perſons, to be true and juſt; it is for men's health to be temperate; and ſo I could inſtance in all other virtues. But this is the myſtery of atheiſm, men are wedded to their luſts and reſolved upon

upon a wicked courſe; and ſo it becomes their intereſt to wiſh there were no GOD, and to believe ſo if they can. Whereas if men were minded to live righteouſly and ſoberly and virtuouſly in the world, "to "believe a GOD" would be no hindrance or prejudice to any ſuch deſign; but very much for the advancement and furtherance of it. Men that are good and virtuous do eaſily believe a GOD; ſo that it is vehemently to be ſuſpected, that nothing but the ſtrength of men's luſts, and the power of vicious inclinations do ſway their minds and ſet a biaſs upon their underſtandings towards atheiſm.

2. Atheiſm is imprudent, becauſe it is unſafe in the iſſue. The atheiſt contends againſt the religious man that there is no GOD; but upon ſtrange inequality and odds, for he ventures his eternal intereſt; whereas the religious man ventures only the loſs of his luſts, (which it is much better for him to be without) or at the utmoſt of ſome temporal convenience; and all this while is inwardly more contented and happy, and uſually more healthful, and perhaps meets with more reſpect and faithfuller friends, and lives in a more ſecure and flouriſhing condition, and more free from the evils and puniſhments of this world, than the atheiſtical perſon does; however, it is not much that he ventures: and after this life, if there be no GOD, is as well as he; but if there be a GOD, is infinitely better, even as much as unſpeakable and eternal happineſs is better than extreme and endleſs miſery. So that if the arguments for and againſt a GOD were equal, and it were an even queſtion whether there were one or not; yet the hazard and danger is ſo infinitely unequal, that in point of prudence

dence and interest every man were obliged to incline to the affirmative: and, whatever doubts he might have about it, to chuse the safest side of the question, and to make that the principle to live by. For, he that acts wisely and is a thoroughly prudent man, will be provided against all events, and will take care to secure the main chance whatever happens; but the atheist, in case things should fall out contrary to his belief and expectation, hath made no provision for this case. If contrary to his confidence it should prove in the issue that there is a GOD, the man is lost and undone for ever. If the atheist when he dies should find that his soul remains after his body, and has only quitted it's lodging, how will this man be amazed and blank'd, when, contrary to his expectation, he shall find himself in a new and strange place, amidst a world of spirits, entred upon an everlasting and unchangeable state? How sadly will the man be disappointed when he finds all things otherwise than he had stated and determined them in this world? When he comes to appear before that GOD whom he hath denied, and against whom he hath spoken as despiteful things as he could, who can imagine the pale and guilty looks of this man, and how he will shiver and tremble "for the fear of the Lord, and for the "glory of his majesty?" How will he be surprised with terrors on every side, to find himself thus unexpectedly and irrecoverably plunged into a state of ruin and desperation? And thus things may happen, for all this man's confidence now. For our belief or disbelief of a thing does not alter the nature of the thing. We cannot fancy things into being, or make them vanish into nothing by the stubborn confidence

SERM. I.

SERM. I.

of our imaginations. Things are as ſullen as we are, and will be what they are whatever we think of them. And if there be a God, a man cannot by an obſtinate diſbelief of him make him ceaſe to be, any more than a man can put out the ſun by winking.

And thus I have, as briefly and clearly as I could, endeavoured to ſhew the ignorance and folly of ſpeculative atheiſm in denying the exiſtence of God. And now it will be leſs needful to ſpeak of the other two principles of religion, the immortality of the ſoul, and future rewards. For no man can have any reaſonable ſcruple about theſe, who believes that there is a God. Becauſe no man that owns the exiſtence of an infinite ſpirit can doubt of the poſſibility of a finite ſpirit, that is, ſuch a thing as is immaterial and does not contain any principle of corruption in it ſelf. And there is no man that believes the goodneſs of God, but muſt be inclin'd to think that he hath made ſome things for as long a duration as they are capable of. Nor can any man, that acknowledgeth the holy and juſt providence of God, and that he loves righteouſneſs and hates iniquity, and that he is a magiſtrate and governor of the world, and conſequently concerned to countenance the obedience, and to puniſh the violation of his laws; and that does withal conſider the promiſcuous diſpenſations many times of God's providence in this world; I ſay, no man that acknowledges all this, can think it unreaſonable to conclude, that after this life good men ſhall be rewarded, and ſinners puniſhed. I have done with the firſt ſort of irreligious perſons, the ſpeculative atheiſt. I ſhall ſpeak but briefly of the other.

Secondly,

SERM. I.

Secondly, the practical Atheist, who is wicked and irreligious, notwithstanding he does in some sort believe that there is a GOD, and a future state; he is likewise guilty of prodigious folly. The principle of the speculative Atheist argues more ignorance, but the practice of the other argues greater folly. Not to believe a GOD, and another life, for which there is so much evidence of reason is great ignorance and folly; but 'tis the highest madness, when a man does believe these things, to live as if he did not believe them: when a man does not doubt but that there is a GOD, and that according as he demeans himself towards him he will make him happy or miserable for ever, yet to live so as if he were certain of the contrary, and as no man in reason can live but he that is well assured that there is no GOD. It was a shrewd saying of the old monk, that two kind of prisons would serve for all offenders in the world, an inquisition and a bedlam: if any man should deny the being of a GOD, and the immortality of the soul, such a one should be put into the first of these, the inquisition, as being a desperate heretick; but if any man should profess to believe these things, and yet allow himself in any known wickedness, such a one should be put into bedlam; because there cannot be a greater folly and madness, than for a man in matters of greatest moment and concernment to act against his best reason and understanding, and by his life to contradict his belief. Such a man does perish with his eyes open, and knowingly undoes himself; he runs upon the greatest dangers, which he clearly sees to be before him, and precipitates himself into those evils, which he professes to believe to be real and into-

2.

lerable; and wilfully neglects the obtaining of that unspeakable good and happiness, which he is persuaded is certain and attainable. Thus much for the second way of confirmation.

III. The third way of confirmation shall be, by endeavouring to vindicate religion from those common imputations, which seem to charge it with ignorance or imprudence. And they are chiefly these three:

1. Credulity.
2. Singularity.
3. Making a foolish bargain.

First, credulity: Say they, the foundation of religion is the belief of those things for which we have no sufficient reason, and consequently of which we can have no good assurance; as the belief of a God, and of a future state after this life; things which we never saw, nor did experience, nor ever spoke with any body that did. Now it seems to argue too great a forwardness and easiness of belief, to assent to any thing upon insufficient grounds.

To this I answer,

1. That if there be such a being as a God, and such a thing as a future state after this life, it cannot (as I said before) in reason be expected, that we should have the evidence of sense for such things: for he that believes a God, believes such a being as hath all perfections, among which this is one, that he is a spirit; and consequently that he is invisible, and cannot be seen. He likewise that believes another life after this, professeth to believe a state of which in this life we have no trial and experience. Besides, if this were a good objection, that no man ever saw these things,

things, it strikes at the atheist as well as us. For no man ever saw the world to be from eternity; nor Epicurus his atoms, of which notwithstanding he believes the world was made. SERM. I.

2. We have the best evidence for these things which they are capable of at present, supposing they were.

3. Those who deny these principles, must be much more credulous, that is, believe things upon incomparably less evidence of reason. The atheist looks upon all that are religious as a company of credulous fools. But he, for his part, pretends to be wiser than to believe any thing for company; he cannot entertain things upon those slight grounds which move other men; if you would win his assent to any thing, you must give him a clear demonstration for it. Now there's no way to deal with this man of reason, this rigid exactor of strict demonstration for things which are not capable of it, but by shewing him that he is an hundred times more credulous, that he begs more principles, takes more things for granted without offering to prove them, and assents to more strange conclusions upon weaker grounds, than those whom he so much accuseth of credulity.

And to evidence this, I shall briefly give you an account of the atheist's creed, and present you with a catalogue of the fundamental articles of his faith. He believes that there is no GOD, nor possibly can be, and consequently that the wise as well as unwise of all ages have been mistaken, except himself and a few more. He believes, that either all the world have been frighted with an apparition of their own fancy, or that they have most unnaturally conspired together

SERM. I.

to cozen themselves; or that this notion of a God is a trick of policy, though the greatest princes and politicians do not at this day know so much, nor have done time out of mind. He believes, either that the heavens and the earth and all things in them had no original cause of their being, or else that they were made by chance and happened he knows not how to be as they are; and that in this last shuffling of matter all things have, by great good fortune, fallen out as happily and as regularly, as if the greatest wisdom had contrived them; but yet he is resolved to believe that there was no wisdom in the contrivance of them. He believes, that matter of it self is utterly void of all sense, understanding and liberty; but for all that he is of opinion that the parts of matter may now and then happen to be so conveniently disposed as to have all these qualities, and most dextrously to perform all those fine and free operations which the ignorant attribute to spirits.

This is the sum of his belief. And it is a wonder, that there should be found any person pretending to reason or wit that can assent to such a heap of absurdities, which are so gross and palpable that they may be felt. So that if every man had his due it will certainly fall to the atheist's share to be the most credulous person, that is, to believe things upon the slightest reasons. For he does not pretend to prove any thing of all this, only he finds himself, he knows not why, inclined to believe so, and to laugh at those that do not.

II. The second imputation is singularity; the affectation whereof is unbecoming a wise man. To this charge I answer,

1. If

1. If by religion be meant the belief of the principles of religion, that there is a GOD, and a providence, that our ſouls are immortal, and that there are rewards to be expected after this life; theſe are ſo far from being ſingular opinions, that they are and always have been the general opinion of mankind, even of the moſt barbarous nations. Inſomuch, that the hiſtories of ancient times do hardly furniſh us with the names of above five or ſix perſons who denied a GOD. And Lucretius acknowledgeth that Epicurus was the firſt who did oppoſe thoſe great foundations of religion, the providence of GOD, and the immortality of the ſoul. *Primum Grajus homo*, &c. meaning Epicurus. SERM. I.

2. If by religion be meant a living up to thoſe principles, that is, to act conformably to our beſt reaſon and underſtanding, and to live as it does become thoſe who do believe a GOD and a future ſtate; this is acknowledged, even by thoſe who live otherwiſe, to be the part of every wiſe man; and the contrary to be the very madneſs of folly, and height of diſtraction: nothing being more ordinary than for men who live wickedly to acknowledge that they ought to do otherwiſe.

3. Though according to the common courſe and practice of the world it be ſomewhat ſingular for men truly and thoroughly to live up to the principles of their religion, yet ſingularity in this matter is ſo far from being a reflection upon any man's prudence, that it is a ſingular commendation of it. In two caſes ſingularity is very commendable.

1. When there is a neceſſity of it in order to a man's greateſt intereſt and happineſs. I think it to be

SERM. I.

be a reasonable account for any man to give why he does not live as the greatest part of the world do, that he has no mind to die as they do and to perish with them; he is not disposed to be a fool, and to be miserable for company; he has no inclination to have his last end like theirs "who know not GOD, and "obey not the gospel of his son, and shall be punish-"ed with everlasting destruction from the presence "of the LORD, and from the glory of his power."

2. It is very commendable to be singular in any excellency, and I have shewn that religion is the greatest excellency: to be singular in any thing that is wise, and worthy, and excellent, is not a disparagement but a praise: every man would chuse to be thus singular.

III. The third imputation is, that religion is a foolish bargain; because they who are religious hazard the parting with a present and certain happiness for that which is future and uncertain. To this I answer,

1. Let it be granted, that the assurance which we have of future rewards falls short of the evidence of sense. For I doubt not, but that saying of our SAVIOUR, "blessed is he who hath believed, and not "seen;" and those expressions of the apostle, "we "walk by faith and not by sight," and "faith is the "evidence of things not seen," are intended by way of abatement and diminution to the evidence of faith, and do signify that the report and testimony of others is not so great evidence as that of our own senses: and though we have sufficient assurance of another state, yet no man can think we have so great evidence as if we our selves had been in the other world and seen how all things are there. 2. We

SERM. I.

2. We have sufficient assurance of these things, and such as may beget in us a well grounded confidence, and free us from all doubts of the contrary, and perswade a reasonable man to venture his greatest interests in this world upon the security that he hath of another: for,

1. We have as much assurance of these things as things future and at a distance are capable of, and he is a very unreasonable man that would desire more: future and invisible things are not capable of the evidence of sense: but we have the greatest rational evidence for them, and in this every reasonable man ought to rest satisfied.

2. We have as much as is abundantly sufficient to justify every man's discretion, who, for the great and eternal things of another world, hazards or parts with the poor and transitory things of this life. And for the clearing of this it will be worth our considering, that the greatest affairs of this world, and the most important concernments of this life, are all conducted only by moral demonstrations. Men every day venture their lives and estates only upon moral assurance. For instance, men who never were at the east or west Indies, or in Turkey or Spain, yet do venture their whole estate in traffick thither, though they have no mathematical demonstration but only moral assurance that there are such places. Nay which is more, men every day eat and drink, though I think no man can demonstrate out of Euclid or Apollonius, that his baker, or brewer, or cook have not conveyed poison into his meat or drink. And that man that would be so wise and cautious, as not to eat or drink till he could demonstrate this to himself, I know no other remedy

SERM. I.

remedy for him but that in great gravity and wisdom he must die for fear of death. And for any man to urge, that though men in temporal affairs proceed upon moral assurance, yet there is greater assurance required to make men seek heaven and avoid hell, seems to me to be highly unreasonable. For such an assurance of things, as will make men circumspect and careful to avoid a lesser danger, ought in all reason to awaken men much more to the avoiding of a greater; such an assurance, as will sharpen mens desires and quicken their endeavours for the obtaining of a lesser good, ought in all reason to animate men more powerfully, and to inspire them with a greater vigour and industry in the pursuit of that which is infinitely greater. For why the same assurance should not operate as well in a great danger as in a less, in a great good as in a small and inconsiderable one, I can see no reason; unless men will say, that the greatness of an evil and danger is an encouragement to men to run upon it, and that the greatness of any good and happiness ought in reason to dishearten men from the pursuit of it.

And now I think I may with reason entreat such as are atheistically inclined to consider these things seriously and impartially; and if there be weight in these considerations which I have offered to them to sway with reasonable men, I would beg of such that they would not suffer themselves to be biassed by prejudice or passion, or the interest of any lust or worldly advantage, to a contrary persuasion.

First, I would entreat them, seriously and diligently to consider these things, because they are of so great moment and concernment to every man. If any

any thing in the world deserve our serious study and consideration, these principles of religion do. For what can import us more to be satisfied in than whether there be a GOD, or not? whether our souls shall perish with our bodies, or be immortal and shall continue for ever? And if so, whether in that eternal state, which remains for men after this life, they shall not be happy or miserable for ever according as they have demeaned themselves in this world? If these things be so, they are of infinite consequence to us; and therefore it highly concerns us to enquire diligently about them, and to satisfy our minds concerning them one way or other. For these are not matters to be slightly and superficially thought upon, much less (as the way of atheistical men is) to be played and jested withal. There is no greater argument of a light and inconsiderate person, than prophanely to scoff at religion. It is a sign that that man hath no regard to himself, and that he is not touched with a sense of his own interest, who loves to be jesting with edg'd tools and to play with life and death. This is the very madman that Solomon speaks of, "who casteth fire-brands, arrows and "death, and saith, am I not in sport?" To examine severely and debate seriously the principles of religion, is a thing worthy of a wise man; but if any man shall turn religion into raillery, and think to confute it by two or three bold jests, this man doth not render religion but himself ridiculous, in the opinion of all considerate men; because he sports with his own life. If the principles of religion were doubtful and uncertain, yet they concern us so nearly that we ought to be serious in the examination of them.

SERM. I

Prov. xxvi. 18.

SERM. I.

And though they were never ſo clear and evident, yet they may be made ridiculous by vain and frothy men; as the graveſt and wiſeſt perſon in the world may be abuſed by being put into a fool's coat, and the moſt noble and excellent poem may be debaſed and made vile by being turned into burleſque. But of this I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak more largely in my next diſcourſe.

So that it concerns every man, that would not trifle away his ſoul and fool himſelf into irrecoverable miſery, with the greateſt ſerioufneſs to enquire into theſe matters whether they be ſo or not, and patiently to conſider the arguments which are brought for them. For many have miſcarried about theſe things, not becauſe there is not reaſon and evidence enough for them, but becauſe they have not had patience enough to conſider them.

Secondly, conſider theſe things impartially. All wicked men are of a party againſt religion. Some luſt or intereſt ingageth them againſt it. Hence it comes to paſs that they are apt to ſlight the ſtrongeſt arguments that can be brought for it, and to cry up very weak ones againſt it. Men do generally and without difficulty aſſent to mathematical truths, becauſe it is no body's intereſt to deny them; but men are ſlow to believe moral and divine truths, becauſe by their luſts and intereſt they are prejudiced againſt them. And therefore you may obſerve that the more virtuouſly any man lives, and the leſs he is enſlaved to any luſt, the more ready he is to entertain the principles of religion.

Therefore when you are examining theſe matters, do not take into conſideration any ſenſual or worldly intereſt,

intereſt, but deal clearly and impartially with your ſelves. Let not temporal and little advantages ſway you againſt a greater and more durable intereſt. Think thus with your ſelves, that you have not the making of things true or falſe, but that the truth and exiſtence of things is already fixed and ſettled, and that the principles of religion are already either determinately true or falſe before you think of them, either there is a GOD, or there is not; either your ſouls are immortal, or they are not; one of theſe is certain and neceſſary, and is not now to be altered; the truth of things will not comply with our conceits, and bend it ſelf to our intereſts. Therefore do not think what you would have to be, but conſider impartially what is, and (if it be) will be whether you will or no. Do not reaſon thus; I would fain be wicked, and therefore it is my intereſt that there ſhould be no GOD, nor no life after this; and therefore I will endeavour to prove that there is no ſuch thing, and will ſhew all the favour I can to that ſide of the queſtion; I will bend my underſtanding and wit to ſtrengthen the negative, and will ſtudy to make it as true as I can. This is fond, becauſe it is the way to cheat thy ſelf; and that we may do as often as we pleaſe, but the nature of things will not be impoſed upon. If then thou be as wiſe as thou oughteſt to be, thou wilt reaſon thus with thy ſelf; my higheſt intereſt is not to be deceived about theſe matters, therefore ſetting aſide all other conſiderations I will endeavour to know the truth and yield to that.

And now it is time to draw towards a concluſion of this long diſcourſe. And that which I have all this while been endeavouring to convince men of and

SERM. I.

to persuade them to, is no other but what GOD himself doth particularly recommend to us as proper for human consideration, "unto man he said, behold "the fear of the LORD that is wisdom, and to depart "from evil is understanding." Whoever pretends to reason, and calls himself a man, is obliged to acknowledge GOD and to demean himself religiously towards him. For GOD is to the understanding of man as the light of the sun is to our eyes, the first and the plainest and the most glorious object of it. He fills heaven and earth, and every thing in them does represent him to us. Which way soever we turn our selves, we are encountered with clear evidences and sensible demonstrations of a deity. For (as the apostle reasons) "the invisible things of him from "the creation of the world are clearly seen, being "understood by the things that are made, even his "eternal power and godhead:" εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀναπολογήτους, so that they are without excuse;" that is, those men that know not GOD have no apology to make for themselves. Or if men do know and believe that there is such a being as GOD, not to consider the proper consequences of such a principle, not to demean our selves towards him as becomes our relation to him and dependance upon him and the duty which we naturally owe him, this is great stupidity and inconsiderateness.

Rom. i. 20.

And yet he that considers the lives and actions of the greatest part of men would verily think, that they understood nothing of all this. Therefore the scripture represents wicked men as without understanding. "It is a nation void of counsel, neither is there any "understanding in them:" and elsewhere, "have "all

Deut. xxxii. 28. Psa. xiv. 4.

" all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" not that they are destitute of the natural faculty of understanding, but they do not use it as they ought; they are not blind, but they wink, " they detain the " truth of GOD in unrighteousness, and though they " know GOD, yet they do not glorify him as GOD," nor suffer the apprehensions of him to have a due influence upon their hearts and lives. SERM. I.

Men generally stand very much upon the credit and reputation of their understandings, and of all things in the world hate to be accounted fools, because it is so great a reproach. The best way to avoid this imputation, and to bring off the credit of our understandings, is to be truly religious, " to fear " the LORD and to depart from evil." For certainly there is no such imprudent person as he that neglects GOD and his soul, and is careless and slothful about his everlasting concernments; because this man acts contrary to his truest reason and best interest; he neglects his own safety, and is active to procure his own ruin; he flies from happiness and runs away from it as fast as he can, but pursues misery and makes haste to be undone. Hence it is that Solomon does all along in the Proverbs give the title of fool to a wicked man, as if it were his proper name and the fittest character of him, because he is so eminently such: there is no fool to the sinner, who every moment ventures his soul and lays his everlasting interest at the stake. Every time a man provokes GOD he does the greatest mischief to himself that can be imagined. A madman, that cuts himself and tears his own flesh, and dashes his head against the stones, does not act so unreasonably as he, because he is not

so

SERM. I.

so sensible of what he does. Wickedness is a kind of voluntary frenzy and a chosen distraction, and every sinner does wilder and more extravagant things than any man can do that is craz'd and out of his wits, only with this sad difference that he knows better what he does. For to them who believe another life after this, an eternal state of happiness or misery in another world, (which is but a reasonable postulatum or demand among Christians) there is nothing in mathematicks more demonstrable than the folly of wicked men; for it is not a clearer and more evident principle that the whole is greater than a part, than that eternity and the concernments of it are to be preferred before time.

I will therefore put the matter into a temporal case, that wicked men who understand any thing of the rules and principles of worldly wisdom may see the imprudence of an irreligious and sinful course, and be convinced "that this their way is their folly, "even themselves being judges.

Is that man wise, as to his body and his health, who only clothes his hands but leaves his whole body naked? who provides only against the tooth-ach, and neglects whole troops of mortal diseases, that are ready to rush in upon him? Just thus does he who takes care only for this vile body, but neglects his precious and immortal soul; who is very solicitous to prevent small and temporal inconveniencies, but takes no care to "escape the damnation of hell."

Is he a prudent man, as to his temporal estate, that lays designs only for a day, without any prospect to, or provision for the remaining part of his life? even so does he that provides for the short time of this life, but

but takes no care for all eternity, which is to be wise for a moment but a fool for ever, and to act as untowardly and as crosly to the reason of things as can be imagined; to regard time as if it were eternity, and to neglect eternity as if it were but a short time.

Do we count him a wise man, who is wise in any thing but in his own proper profession and employment, wise for every body but himself; who is ingenious to contrive his own misery and to do himself a mischief, but is dull and stupid as to the designing of any real benefit and advantage to himself? Such a one is he, who is ingenious in his calling but a bad Christian; for Christianity is more our proper calling and profession than the very trades we live upon: and such is every sinner, who is "wise to do evil, "but to do good hath no understanding.

Is it wisdom in any man to neglect and disoblige him who is his best friend, and can be his forest enemy? or with one weak troop to go out to meet him that comes against him with thousands of thousands, to fly a small danger and run upon a greater? Thus does every wicked man that neglects and contemns God, "who can save or destroy him;" who strives with his "maker and provoketh the Lord to jealou-"sy," and with the small and inconsiderable forces of a man takes the field against the "mighty God, "the Lord of hosts;" who "fears them that can "kill the body, but after that have no more that "they can do; but fears not him, who after he hath "kill'd, can destroy both body and soul in hell;" and thus does he who for fear of any thing in this world ventures to displease God, for in so doing he runs away from men, and "falls into the hands of

SERM. I. " the living God," he flies from a temporal danger and leaps into hell.

Is not he an imprudent man, who in matters of greatest moment and concernment neglects opportunities never to be retriev'd, who standing upon the shore, and seeing the tide making haste towards him apace, and that he hath but a few minutes to save himself, yet will lay himself to sleep there till the cruel sea rush in upon him and overwhelm him? And is he any better who trifles away this day of God's grace and patience, and foolishly adjourns the necessary work of repentance and the weighty business of religion to a dying hour?

And to put an end to these questions, is he wise who hopes to attain the end without the means, nay, by means that are quite contrary to it? such is every wicked man who hopes to be blessed hereafter without being holy here, and to be happy, that is, to find a pleasure in the enjoyment of God, and in the company of holy spirits, by rendring himself as unsuitable and unlike to them as he can.

Wouldst thou then be truly wise? be wise for thy self, wise for thy soul, wise for eternity. Resolve upon a religious course of life. " Fear God and de- " part from evil." Look beyond things present and sensible unto things which are not seen and are eternal, labour to secure the great interests of another world, and refer all the actions of this short and dying life to that state which will shortly begin but never have an end: and this will approve it self to be wisdom at the last, whatever the world judge of it now. For not that which is approved of men now, but what shall finally be approved by God is true wisdom;

wisdom; that which is esteemed so by him who is the fountain and original of all wisdom, the first rule and measure, the best and most competent judge of it. SERM. I.

I deny not but that those that are wicked and neglect religion may think themselves wise, and may enjoy this their delusion for a while: but there is a time a coming when the most prophane and atheistical, who now account it a piece of gallantry, and an argument of a great spirit, and of a more than common wit and understanding, to slight God and to baffle religion, and to level all the discourses of another world with the poetical descriptions of the fairy-land; I say, there is a day a coming, when all these witty fools shall be unhappily undeceived, and not being able to enjoy their delusion any longer shall call themselves fools for ever.

But why should I use so much importunity to persuade men to that which is so excellent, so useful, and so necessary? The thing it self hath allurements in it beyond all arguments: for if religion be the best knowledge and wisdom, I cannot offer any thing beyond this to your understandings to raise your esteem of it; I can present nothing beyond this to your affections to excite your love and desire. All that can be done is to set the thing before men, and to offer it to their choice; and if men's natural desire of wisdom and knowledge and happiness will not persuade them to be religious, it is in vain to use arguments: if the sight of these beauties will not charm men's affections, it is to no purpose to go about to compel a liking, and to urge and push forward a match to the making whereof consent is necessary. Religion is matter of our freest choice, and if men will obsti-

SERM. I.

nately and wilfully set themselves against it there is no remedy. *Pertinaciæ nullum remedium posuit* DEUS, "God has provided no remedy for the obstinacy of "men;" but if they will chuse to be fools and to be miserable, he will leave them to inherit their own choice, and to enjoy the portion of sinners.

SERMON II.

The folly of scoffing at religion.

2 PET. iii. 3.

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.

SERM. II.

KNowing this first. In the verse before, the apostle was speaking of a famous prophecy before the accomplishment of which this sort of men whom he calls scoffers should come. "That "ye may be mindful of the words which were spok-"en before by the holy prophets, and of the com-"mandment of us the apostles of our LORD and SA-"VIOUR; knowing this first, that there shall come "in the last days scoffers," &c.

The prophecy here spoken of is probably that famous prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem which is in the prophet Daniel, and before the fulfilling whereof our SAVIOUR expressly tells us "false pro-"phets should arise and deceive many."

Mat. xxiv. 11.

Now the scoffers here spoken of are the false teachers whom the apostle had been describing all along in the foregoing chapter, "there were false prophets "also among the people, even as there shall be false "teachers among you." These, he tells us, should proceed to that height of impiety as to scoff at the principles of religion, and to deride the expectations of a future judgment, "in the last days shall come "scoffers walking after their own lusts, and saying "where is the promise of his coming? SERM. II.

In speaking to these words, I shall do these three things.

1. Consider the nature of the sin here mentioned, which is scoffing at religion.

2. The character of the persons that are charged with the guilt of this sin, they are said "to walk af-"ter their own lusts."

3. I shall represent to you the heinousness and the aggravations of this vice.

I. First, we will consider the nature of the sin here mentioned, which is scoffing at religion, "there "shall come scoffers:" these, it seems, were a sort of people that derided our SAVIOUR's prediction of his coming to judge the world. So the apostle tells us in the next words, that they said "where is the pro-"mise of his coming?"

In those times there was a common persuasion among Christians "that the day of the LORD was at "hand," as the apostle elsewhere tells us. Now this, it is probable, these scoffers twitted the Christians withal; and because CHRIST did not come when some looked for him they concluded he would not come at all. Upon this they derided the Christians as enduring persecution in a vain expectation of that 2 Thes. iii. 2.

SERM. II.

which was never likely to happen. They saw all things continue "as they were from the beginning "of the world," notwithstanding the apprehensions of Christians concerning the approaching end of it; "for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue "as they were, from the beginning of the world." Since the fathers fell a-sleep, ἀφ' ἧς, which may either be rendered from the time, or else (which seems more agreeable to the atheistical discourse of these men) saving or except that the fathers are fallen asleep, all things continue as they were; saving that men die and one generation succeeds another, they saw no change or alteration. They looked upon all things as going on in a constant course; one generation of men passed away and another came in the room of it, but the world remained still as it was. And thus for ought they knew things might hold on for ever. So that the principles of these men seem to be much the same with those of the Epicureans, who denied the providence of GOD and the immortality of men's souls; and consequently a future judgment which should sentence men to rewards and punishments in another world. These great and fundamental principles of all religion they derided as the fancies and dreams of a company of melancholy men, who were weary of the world and pleased themselves with vain conceits of happiness and ease in another life. But as for them, they believed none of those things; and therefore gave all manner of licence and indulgence to their lusts.

But this belongs to the second thing I propounded to speak to, namely,

II. The

II. The character which is here given of these scoffers; they are said "to walk after their own lusts." And no wonder if when they denied a future judgment they gave up themselves to all manner of sensuality.

St. Jude in his epistle gives much the same character of them that St. Peter here does, ver. 18, 19. "there shall come in the last days mockers, walking "after their own ungodly lusts, sensual, not having "the spirit." So that we see what kind of persons they are who prophanely scoff at religion, men of sensual spirits and of licentious lives. For this character, which the apostle here gives of the scoffers of that age, was not an accidental thing which happened to those persons, but is the constant character of them who deride religion, and flows from the very temper and disposition of those who are guilty of this impiety; it is both the usual preparation to it, and the natural consequent of it.

To deride God and religion is the highest kind of impiety. And men do not usually arrive to this degree of wickedness at first, but they come to it by several steps. The Psalmist very elegantly expresseth to us the several gradations by which men at last come to this horrid degree of impiety; "blessed is Psa. i. 1. "the man, that walketh not in the counsel of the "ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor "sitteth in the seat of the scornful." Men are usually first corrupted by bad counsel and company, which is called "walking in the counsel of the un-"godly;" next they habituate themselves to their vicious practices, which is "standing in the way of "sinners;" and then at last they take up and settle in a contempt of all religion, which is called "sitting "in the seat of the scornful."

For

SERM. II.

For when men once indulge themselves in wicked courses, the vicious inclinations of their minds sway their understandings, and make them apt to disbelieve those truths which contradict their lusts. Every inordinate lust and passion is a false bias upon men's understandings which naturally draws toward atheism. And when men's judgments are once biassed they do not believe according to the evidence of things, but according to their humour and their interest. For when men live as if there were no GOD it becomes expedient for them that there should be none: and then they endeavour to persuade themselves so, and will be glad to find arguments to fortify themselves in this persuasion. Men of dissolute lives cry down religion, because they would not be under the restraints of it; they are loth to be tied up by the strict laws and rules of it: it is their interest more than any reason they have against it which makes them despise it, they hate it because they are reproved by it. So our SAVIOUR tells us, that "men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; for every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

John iii. 19, 20.

I remember it is the saying of one, who hath done more by his writings to debauch the age with atheistical principles than any man that lives in it, "that when reason is against a man, then a man will be against reason." I am sure this is the true account of such mens enmity to religion, religion is against them, and therefore they set themselves against religion. The principles of religion and the doctrines of the holy scriptures are terrible enemies to wicked men,

men, they are continually flying in their faces and galling their consciences: And this is that which makes them kick against religion, and spurn at the doctrines of that holy book. And this may probably be one reason why many men, who are observed to be sufficiently dull in other matters, yet can talk prophanely and speak against religion with some kind of salt and smartness, because religion is the thing that frets them; and as in other things so in this *vexatio dat intellectum*, the inward trouble and vexation of their minds gives them some kind of wit and sharpness in rallying upon religion. Their consciences are galled by it, and this makes them winch and fling as if they had some metal. For, let men pretend what they will, there is no ease and comfort of mind to be had from atheistical principles. 'Tis found by experience, that none are more apprehensive of danger or more fearful of death than this sort of men: even when they are in prosperity they ever and anon feel many inward stings and lashes, but when any great affliction or calamity overtakes them they are the most poor-spirited creatures in the whole world. SERM. II.

The sum is, the true reason why any man is an atheist is because he is a wicked man. Religion would curb him in his lusts, and therefore he casts it off and puts all the scorn upon it he can. Besides, that men think it some kind of apology for their vices that they do not act contrary to any principle they profess: their practice is agreeable to what they pretend to believe, and so they think to vindicate themselves, and their own practices, by laughing at those for fools who believe any thing to the contrary.

III. The

SERM. II.

III. The third thing I propounded was, to represent to you the heinousness and the aggravations of this vice. And to make this out we will make these three suppositions, which are as many as the thing will bear.

1. Suppose there were no GOD, and that the principles of religion were false.

2. Suppose the matter were doubtful, and the arguments equal on both sides.

3. Suppose it certain that there is a GOD, and that the principles of religion are true. Put the case how we will, I shall shew that the humour is intolerable.

1. Suppose there were no GOD, and that the principles of religion were false. Not that there is any reason for such a supposition, but onely to shew the unreasonableness of this humour; Put the case that these men were in the right, in denying the principles of religion, and that all that they pretend were true; yet so long as the generality of mankind believes the contrary, it is certainly a great rudeness, or incivility at least, to deride and scoff at these things. Indeed upon this supposition there could be no such thing as sin, but yet it would be a great offence against the laws of civil conversation. Suppose then, the atheist were wiser than all the world, and that he did upon good grounds know that all mankind, besides himself and two or three more, were mistaken about the matters of religion; yet if he were either so wise, or so civil as he should be, he would keep all this to himself, and not affront other men about these things.

I remember that that law which GOD gave to the people of Israel, "thou shalt not speak evil of the rulers

" rulers of thy people;" is render'd by Josephus in a very different sense: " what other nations account " gods, let no man blaspheme." And this is not so different from the Hebrew as at first sight one would imagine, for the same Hebrew word signifies both gods and rulers. But whether this be the meaning of that law or not there is a great deal of reason in the thing. For though every man have a right to dispute against a false religion, and to urge it with all it's absurd and ridiculous consequences, as the ancient fathers did in their disputes with the heathen; yet it is a barbarous incivility for any man scurrilously to make sport with that which others account religion, not with any design to convince their reason but only to provoke their rage.

SERM. II.

But now the atheist can pretend no obligation of conscience why he should so much as dispute against the principles of religion, much less deride them. He that pretends to any religion may pretend conscience for opposing a contrary religion: but he that denies all religion, can pretend no conscience for any thing. A man may be obliged indeed in reason and common humanity to free his neighbour from a hurtful error; but supposing there were no God, this notion of a deity and the principles of religion have taken such a deep root in the mind of man, that either they are not to be extinguished, or if they be it would be no kindness to any man to endeavour it for him, because it is not to be done but with so much trouble and violence, that the remedy would be worse than the disease.

For if this notion of a deity be founded in a natural fear, it is in vain to attempt to expel it; for whatever violence may be offer'd to nature by endea-

SERM. II.

vouring to reason men into a contrary persuasion, nature will still recoil and at last return to itself, and then the fear will be augmented from the apprehension of the dangerous consequences of such an impiety. So that nothing can create more trouble to a man than to endeavour to dispossess him of this conceit, because nature is but irritated by the contest, and the man's fears will be doubled upon him.

But if we suppose this apprehension of a deity to have no foundation in nature, but to have had it's rise from tradition which hath been confirmed in the world by the prejudice of education, the difficulty of removing it will almost be as great as if it were natural, that which men take in by education being next to that which is natural. And if it could be extinguished, yet the advantage of it will not recompence the trouble of the cure. For, except the avoiding of persecution for religion, there is no advantage that the principles of atheism, if they could be quietly settled in a man's mind, can give him. The advantage indeed that men make of them is to give themselves the liberty to do what they please, to be more sensual and more unjust than other men; that is, they have the privilege to surfeit themselves and to be sick oftner than other men, and to make mankind their enemy by their unjust and dishoneſt actions, and consequently to live more uneasily in the world than other men.

So that the principles of religion, the belief of a God, and another life, by obliging men to be virtuous do really promote their temporal happiness. And all the privilege that atheism pretends to is to let men loose to vice, which is naturally attended with temporal inconveniencies. And if this be true, then

the

the atheist cannnot pretend this reason of charity to mankind (which is the only one I can think of) to dispute against religion, much less to rally upon it. For it is plain, that it would be no kindness to any man to be undeceived in these principles of religion, supposing they were false. Because the principles of religion are so far from hindring, that they promote a man's happiness even in this world, and as to the other world there can be no inconvenience in the mistake, for when a man is not it will be no trouble to him that he was once deceived about these matters. SERM. II.

And where no obligation of conscience nor of reason can be pretended, there certainly the laws of civility ought to take place. Now men do profess to believe that there is a GOD, and that the common principles of religion are true, and to have a great veneration for these things. Can there then be a greater insolence, than for a man when he comes into company to rally and fall foul upon those things, for which he knows the company have a reverence? Can one man offer a greater affront to another, than to expose to scorn him whom he owns and declares to be his best friend, the patron of his life, and the greatest benefactor he hath in the world? And doth not every man that owns a GOD say this of him?

But when the generality of mankind are of the same opinion the rudeness is still the greater. So that whoever doth openly contemn GOD and religion does *delinquere in majestatem populi & humani generis*, he does offend against the majesty of the people, and that reverence which is due to the common apprehensions of mankind, whether they be true or not; which is the greatest incivility that can be imagined.

SERM. II.

This is the first consideration, and it is the least that I have to urge in this matter. But yet I have insisted the longer upon it, because it is such a one as ought especially to prevail upon those who I am afraid are too often guilty of this vice, I mean those who are of better breeding, because they pretend to understand the laws of behaviour and the decencies of conversation better than other men.

2. Supposing it were doubtful whether there be a God or not, and whether the principles of religion were true or not, and that the arguments were equal on both sides; yet it would be a great folly to deride these things. And here I suppose as much as the atheist can with any colour of reason pretend to. For no man ever yet pretended to demonstrate that there is no God, nor no life after this. For these being pure negatives are capable of no proof, unless a man could shew them to be plainly impossible. The utmost that is pretended is that the arguments that are brought for these things are not sufficient to convince. But if they were only probable, so long as no arguments are produced to the contrary, that cannot in reason be denied to be a great advantage.

But I will for the present suppose the probabilities equal on both sides. And upon this supposition I doubt not to make it appear to be a monstrous folly to deride these things. Because though the arguments on both sides were equal, yet the danger and hazard is infinitely unequal.

If it prove true that there is no God the religious man may be as happy in this world as the atheist, nay the principles of religion and virtue do in their own nature tend to make him happier. Because they

give

give satisfaction to his mind, and his conscience by this means is freed from many fearful girds and twinges which the atheist feels. Besides, that the practice of religion and virtue doth naturally promote our temporal felicity. It is more for a man's health, and more for his reputation, and more for his advantage in all other worldly respects to lead a virtuous than a vicious course of life. And for the other world, if there be no God the case of the religious man and the atheist will be alike, because they will both be extinguished by death and insensible of any farther happiness or misery. SERM. II.

But then if the contrary opinion should prove true, that there is a God; and that the souls of men are transmitted out of this world into the other, there to receive the just reward of their actions: then it is plain to every man at first sight, that the case of the religious man and the atheist must be vastly different: then, where shall the wicked, and the ungodly appear? And what think we shall be the portion of those who have affronted God, and derided his word, and made a mock of every thing that is sacred and religious? What can they expect but to be rejected by him whom they have renounced, and to feel the terrible effects of that power and justice which they have despised? So that though the arguments on both sides were equal, yet the danger is not so. On the one side there is none at all, but it is infinite on the other. And consequently, it must be a monstrous folly for any man to make a mock of those things, which he knows not whether they be or not; and if they be, of all things in the world they are no jesting matters.

3. Sup-

SERM. II.

3. Suppose there be a God, and that the principles of religion are true, then is it not only a heinous impiety, but a perfect madness to scoff at these things. And that there is a God, and that the principles of religion are true, I have already in my former discourse endeavoured to prove; both from the things which are made, and from the general consent of mankind in these principles; of which universal consent no sufficient reason can be given unless they were true. And supposing they are so, it is not only the utmost pitch of impiety but the highest flight of folly that can be imagined to deride these things. To be disobedient to the commands of God is a great contempt, but to deny his being, and to make sport with his word, and to endeavour to render it ridiculous by turning the wise and weighty sayings of that holy book into raillery, is a most direct affront to the God that is above. Thus the Psalmist describes these atheistical persons as levelling their blasphemies immediately against the majesty of heaven. "They "set their mouth against the heavens, and their "tongue walketh through the earth?" they do mischief among men, but the affront is immediately to God.

Besides, that this prophane spirit is an argument of a most incorrigible temper. The wise man every where speaks of the scorner as one of the worst sort of sinners and hardest to be reclaimed, because he despiseth instruction and mocks at all the means whereby he should be reformed.

And then, is it not a most black and horrid ingratitude thus to use the author of our beings and the patron of our lives; to make a scorn of him that made

us,

us, and to live in an open defiance of him " in whom " we live, move, and have our beings ?" But this is not all. As it is a most heinous so it is a most dangerous impiety, to despise him that can destroy us, and to oppose him who is infinitely more powerful than we are. " Will ye (says the apostle) provoke " the LORD to jealousy ? are ye stronger than he ?" What Gamaliel said to the Jews, in another case, may with a little change be applied to this sort of men; if there be a GOD, and the principles of religion be true " ye cannot overthrow them, therefore refrain " from speaking against these things lest ye be found " fighters against GOD." SERM. II.

I will but add one thing more to shew the folly of this prophane temper. And that is this, that as it is the greatest of all other sins, so there is in truth the least temptation to it. When the devil tempts men with riches or honour to ruin themselves, he offers them some kind of consideration, but the prophane person serves the devil for naught, and sins only for sin's sake, suffers himself to be tempted to the greatest sins, and into the greatest dangers, for no other reward but the slender reputation of seeming to say that wittily, which no wise man would say. And what a folly is this, for a man to offend his conscience to please his humour, and only for his jest to lose two of the best friends he hath in the world, GOD and his own soul?

I have done with the three things I propounded to speak to upon this argument, and now I beg your patience to apply what I have said to these three purposes.

1. To take men off from this impious and dangerous folly of prophaneness, which by some is miscalled wit.

SERM. II.

2. To caution men not to think the worse of religion, because some are so bold as to despise and deride it.

3. To persuade men to employ that reason and wit, which GOD hath given them, to better and nobler purposes in the service and to the glory of that GOD who hath bestowed these gifts on men.

1. To take men off from this impious and dangerous folly. I know not how it comes to pass that some men have the fortune to be esteemed wits only for jesting out of the common road, and for making bold to scoff at those things which the greatest part of mankind reverence. As if a man should be accounted a wit for reviling those in authority, which is no more an argument of any man's wit than it is of his discretion. A wise man would not speak contemptuously of a great prince though he were out of his dominions, because he remembers that kings have long hands, and that their power and influence does many times reach a great way farther than their direct authority. But "GOD is a great king, and in "his hands are all the corners of the earth; we can "go no whither from his spirit, nor can we fly from "his presence;" wherever we are his eyes see us, and his right hand can reach us. If men did truly consult the interest either of their safety or reputation, they would never exercise their wit in dangerous matters. Wit is a very commendable quality, but then a wise man should always have the keeping of it. It is a sharp weapon, as apt for mischief as for good purposes if it be not well managed. The proper use of it is to season conversation, to represent what is praise-worthy to the greatest advantage, and to expose the

the vices and follies of men, such things as are in themselves truly ridiculous: but if it be applied to the abuse of the gravest and most serious matters it then loses it's commendation. If any man think he abounds in this quality and hath wit to spare, there is scope enough for it within the bounds of religion and decency, and when it transgresseth these it degenerates into insolence and impiety. All wit which borders upon prophaneness, and makes bold with those things to which the greatest reverence is due, deserves to be branded for folly. SERM. II.

And if we would preserve ourselves from the infection of this vice we must take heed how we scoff at religion, under any form, lest insensibly we derive some contempt upon religion it self. And we must likewise take heed how we accustom ourselves to a slight and irreverent use of the Name of GOD, and of the phrases and expressions of the holy bible, which ought not to be applied upon every light occasion. Men will easily slide into the highest degree of prophaneness, who are not careful to preserve a due reverence for the great and glorious name of GOD, and an awful regard to the holy scriptures. None so nearly disposed to scoffing at religion as those who have accustomed themselves to swear upon trifling occasions. For it is just with GOD to permit those, who allow themselves in one degree of prophaneness, to proceed to another, till at last they come to that height of impiety as to contemn all religion.

2. Let no man think the worse of religion, because some are so bold as to despise and deride it. For 'tis no disparagement to any person or thing to be laught at, but to deserve to be so. The most grave

and serious matters in the whole world are liable to be abus'd. It is a known saying of Epictetus, "that "every thing hath two handles;" by which he means, that there is nothing so bad but a man may lay hold of something or other about it that will afford matter of excuse and extenuation, nor nothing so excellent but a man may fasten upon something or other belonging to it whereby to traduce it. A sharp wit may find something in the wisest man whereby to expose him to the contempt of injudicious people. The gravest book that ever was written may be made ridiculous, by applying the sayings of it to a foolish purpose. For a jest may be obtruded upon any thing. And therefore no man ought to have the less reverence for the principles of religion, or for the holy scriptures, because idle and prophane wits can break jests upon them. Nothing is so easy as to take particular phrases and expressions out of the best book in the world, and to abuse them by forcing an odd and ridiculous sense upon them. But no wise man will think a good book foolish for this reason, but the man that abuses it; nor will he esteem that to which every thing is liable to be a just exception against any thing. At this rate we must despise all things, but surely the better and the shorter way is to contemn those who would bring any thing that is worthy into contempt.

3. And lastly, to persuade men to employ that reason and wit, which GOD hath given them, to better and nobler purposes, in the service and to the glory of that GOD who hath bestowed these gifts on men, as Aholiab and Bezaleel did their mechanical skill in the adorning and beautifying of GOD's tabernacle.

For this is the perfection of every thing, to attain it's true and proper end; and the end of all those gifts and endowments which GOD hath given us is to glorify the giver.

Here is subject enough to exercise the wit of men and angels: to praise that infinite goodness, and almighty power, and exquisite wisdom which made us and all things; and to admire what we can never sufficiently praise; to vindicate the wise and just providence of GOD, in the government of the world; and to endeavour, as well as we can, upon an imperfect view of things, to make out the beauty and harmony of all the seeming discords and irregularities of the divine administrations; to explain the oracles of the holy scriptures, and to adore that great mystery of divine love (which the angels, better and nobler creatures than we are, desire to pry into) GOD's sending his only son into the world to save sinners, and to give his life a ransom for them. These would be noble exercises indeed for the tongues and pens of the greatest wits. And subjects of this nature are the best trials of our ability in this kind. Satyr and invective are the easiest kind of wit. Almost any degree of it will serve to abuse and find fault. For wit is a keen instrument, and every one can cut an dgash with it, but to carve a beautiful image and to polish it requires great art and dexterity. To praise any thing well is an argument of much more wit, than to abuse. A little wit and a great deal of ill nature will furnish a man for satyr, but the greatest instance of wit is to commend well. And perhaps the best things are the hardest to be duly commended. For though there be a great deal of matter to work upon, yet there

SERM. II.

is great judgment required to make choice, and where the subject is great and excellent it is hard not to sink below the dignity of it.

This I say on purpose to recommend to men a nobler exercise for their wits, and if it be possible, to put them out of conceit with that scoffing humour which is so easy, and so ill natured, and is not only an enemy to religion, but to every thing else that is wise and worthy. And I am very much mistaken, if the state as well as the church, the civil government as well as religion, do not in a short space find the intolerable inconvenience of this humour.

But I confine my self to the consideration of religion. And it is sad indeed, that in a nation professing Christianity so horrid an impiety should dare to appear. But the scripture hath foretold us that this sort of men should arise in the gospel-age, and they did appear even in the apostle's days. That which is more sad and strange is, that we should persist in this prophaneness notwithstanding the terrible judgments of GOD, which have been abroad in this nation. GOD hath of late years manifested himself in a very dreadful manner, as if it were on purpose to give a check to this insolent impiety. And now that those judgments have done no good upon us we may justly fear that he will appear once for all. And it is time for him to shew himself when his very being is called in question, and to come and judge the world when men begin to doubt whether he made it.

The scripture mentions two things as the fore-runners and reasons of his coming to judgment, infidelity, and prophane scoffing at religion. "When the "son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?" Luke xviii. 8.

And

And St. Jude out of an ancient prophecy of Enoch expressly mentions this as one reason of the coming of the LORD, "to convince ungodly sinners of all "their hard speeches which they had spoken against "him." SERM. II. Jude 15. ver.

And if these things be a sign and reason of his coming, I wish that we in this age had not too much cause to apprehend "the judge to be at the door." This impiety did forerun the destruction of Jerusalem and the utter ruin of the jewish nation. And if it hold on amongst us may not we have reason to fear that either "the end of all things is at hand," or that some very dismal calamity greater than any our eyes have yet seen does hang over us? But I would fain hope that GOD hath mercy still for us, and that men will pity themselves, and repent, "and give glory to "GOD," and "know in this their day the things that "belong to their peace." Which GOD of his infinite mercy grant for the sake of CHRIST, to whom with the father, &c.

SERMON

SERMON III.

The advantages of religion to ſocieties.

PROV. xiv. 34.

Righteouſneſs exalteth a nation; but ſin is the reproach of any people.

SERM. III.

ONE of the firſt principles that is planted in the nature of man, and which lies at the very root and foundation of his being, is the deſire of his own preſervation and happineſs. Hence it is that every man is led by intereſt, and does love or hate, chuſe or refuſe things, according as he apprehends them to conduce to this end, or to contradict it. And becauſe the happineſs of this life is moſt preſent and ſenſible, therefore human nature (which in this degenerate ſtate is extremely ſunk down into ſenſe) is moſt powerfully affected with ſenſible and temporal things. And conſequently, there cannot be a greater prejudice raiſed againſt any thing than to have it repreſented as inconvenient and hurtful to our temporal intereſts.

Upon this account it is, that religion hath extremely ſuffered in the opinion of many, as if it were oppoſite to our preſent welfare, and did rob men of the greateſt advantages and conveniencies of life. So that he that would do right to religion, and make a ready way for the entertainment of it among men, cannot take a more effectual courſe than by reconciling it with

with the happiness of mankind, and by giving satisfaction to our reason, that it is so far from being an enemy, that it is the greatest friend to our temporal interests; and that it doth not only tend to make every man happy considered singly and in a private capacity, but is excellently fitted for the benefit of human society. SERM. III.

How much religion tends even to the temporal advantage of private persons I shall not now consider, because my text leads me to discourse of the other, namely, to shew how advantageous religion and virtue are to the publick prosperity of a nation, which I take to be the meaning of this aphorism of Solomon, "righteousness exalteth a nation," &c.

And here I shall not restrain righteousness to the particular virtue of justice (though in this sense also this saying is most true) but enlarge it according to the genius and strain of the book of the Proverbs, in which the words wisdom and righteousness are commonly used very comprehensively so as to signify all religion and virtue. And that this word is so to be taken in the text, may appear farther from the opposition of it to sin or vice in general; righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people.

You see then what will be the subject of my present discourse; namely, that "religion and virtue "are the great causes of publick happiness and pro- "sperity.

And though the truth of this hath been universally acknowledged and long enough experienced in the world, yet because the fashion of the age is to call every thing into question, it will be requisite to satisfy mens reason about it. To which end I shall do these two things.

1. Endeavour

SERM. III.

1. Endeavour to give an account of this truth.

2. To vindicate it from the pretences and insinuations of atheistical persons.

I. I shall give you this two-fold account of it.

1. From the justice of the divine providence.

2. From the natural tendency of the thing.

1. From the justice of the divine providence. Indeed as to particular persons, the providences of God are many times promiscuously administred in this world; so that no man can certainly conclude God's love or hatred to any person, by any thing that befals him in this life. But God does not deal thus with nations. Because publick bodies and communities of men, as such, can only be rewarded and punished in this world. For in the next, all those publick societies and combinations wherein men are now linked together under several governments, shall be dissolved. God will not then reward or punish nations, as nations; but every man shall then give an account of himself to God, and receive his own reward, and bear his own burthen. For although God account it no disparagement to his justice to let particular good men suffer in this world, and pass "through many tribu-"lations into the kingdom of God," because there is another day a coming which will be a more proper season of reward; yet in the usual course of his providence he recompenseth religious and virtuous nations with temporal blessings and prosperity. For which reason St. Austin tells us, that the mighty success and long prosperity of the Romans was a reward given them by God for their eminent justice and temperance, and other virtues. And on the other hand, God many times suffers the most grievous sins of particular persons

persons to go unpunished in this world, because he knows that his justice will have another and better opportunity to meet and reckon with them. But the general and crying sins of a nation cannot hope to escape publick judgments, unless they be prevented by a general repentance. GOD may defer his judgments for a time, and give a people a longer space of repentance, he may stay till the iniquities of a nation be full, but sooner or later they have reason to expect his vengeance. And usually the longer punishment is delayed it is the heavier when it comes. SERM. III.

Now all this is very reasonable, because this world is the only season for national punishments. And indeed they are in a great degree necessary for the present vindication of the honour and majesty of the divine laws, and to give some check to the overflowing of wickedness. Publick judgments are the banks and shores upon which GOD breaks the insolency of sinners, and stays their proud waves. And though among men the multitude of offenders be many times a cause of impunity, because of the weakness of human governments, which are glad to spare where they are not strong enough to punish, yet in the government of GOD, things are quite otherwise. No combination of sinners is too hard for him, and the greater and more numerous the offenders are, the more his justice is concern'd to vindicate the affront. However GOD may pass by single sinners in this world, yet when a nation combines against him, "when hand joins in hand the wicked shall not go "unpunished.

This the scripture declares to be the settled course of GOD's providence; That a righteous nation shall

2

SERM. III.

be happy; "the work of righteousness shall be peace; "and the effects of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever." And on the other hand, that he useth to shower down his judgments upon a wicked people, "he turneth a fruitful land into barrenness "for the wickedness of them that dwell therein."

And the experience of all ages hath made this good. All along the history of the old testament, we find the interchangeable providences of God towards the people of Israel always suited to their manners. They were constantly prosperous or afflicted, according as piety and virtue flourished or declined amongst them. And God did not only exercise this providence towards his own people, but he dealt thus also with other nations. The Roman empire whilst the virtue of that people remained firm was strong as iron, as it is represented in the prophecy of Daniel: but upon the dissolution of their manners the iron began to be mixt with miry clay, and the feet, upon which that empire stood, to be broken. And though God in the administration of his justice be not tied to precedents, and we cannot argue from scripture-examples that the providences of God towards other nations shall in all circumstances be conformable to his dealings with the people of Israel; yet thus much may with great probability be collected from them, that as God always blessed that people while they were obedient to him, and followed them with his judgments when they rebelled against him, so he will also deal with other nations. Because the reason of those dispensations as to the main and substance of them seems to be perpetual, and founded in that which can never change, the justice of the divine providence.

2dly, The

2dly. The truth of this farther appears, from the natural tendency of the thing. For religion in general, and every particular virtue, doth in it's own nature conduce to the publick interest. SERM. III.

Religion, wherever it is truly planted, is certainly the greatest obligation upon conscience to all civil offices and moral duties. Chastity and temperance and industry do in their own nature tend to health and plenty. Truth and fidelity in all our dealings do create mutual love and good-will and confidence among men, which are the great bands of peace. And on the contrary, wickedness doth in it's own nature produce many publick mischiefs. For as sins are link'd together, and draw on one another, so almost every vice hath some temporal inconvenience annexed to it and naturally following it. Intemperance and lust breed infirmities and diseases, which being propagated spoil the strain of a nation. Idleness and luxury bring forth poverty and want; and this tempts men to injustice, and that causeth enmity and animosities, and these bring on "strife and confusion and "every evil work." This philosophical account of publick troubles and confusions St. James gives us, "whence come wars and fightings among you? are "they not hence, even from your lusts that war in "your members? Jam. 4. 1.

But I shall shew more particularly, that religion and virtue do naturally tend to the good order and more easy government of human society, because they have a good influence both upon magistrates and subjects.

1. Upon magistrates. Religion teacheth them to rule over men in the fear of God, because though

SERM. III.

they be gods on earth, yet they are subjects of heaven, and accountable to him who is higher than the highest in this world. Religion in a magistrate strengthens his authority, because it procures veneration and gains a reputation to it. And in all the affairs of this world so much reputation is really so much power. We see that piety and virtue, where they are found among men of lower degree, will command some reverence and respect: But in persons of eminent place and dignity they are seated to a great advantage, so as to cast a lustre upon their very place, and by a strong reflection to double the beams of majesty. Whereas impiety and vice do strangely lessen greatness, and do secretly and unavoidably derive some weakness upon authority itself. Of this the scripture gives us a remarkable instance in David. For among other things which made "the sons of Zeruiah too "hard for him," this probably was none of the least, that they were particularly conscious to his crimes.

2. Religion hath a good influence upon the people; to make them obedient to government, and peaceable one towards another.

1. To make them obedient to government, and conformable to laws; and that not only for wrath and out of fear of the magistrates power, which is but a weak and loose principle of obedience, and will cease whenever men can rebel with safety, and to advantage; but out of conscience, which is a firm, and constant and lasting principle, and will hold a man fast when all other obligations will break. He that hath entertain'd the true principles of Christianity is not to be tempted from his obedience and subjection by any worldly considerations, because he be-

lieves that " whosoever resisteth authority resisteth " the ordinance of GOD," and that " they who resist " shall receive to themselves damnation." SERM. III.

2. Religion tends to make men peaceable one towards another. For it endeavours to plant all those qualities and dispositions in men which tend to peace and unity, and to fill men with a spirit of universal love and good will. It endeavours likewise to secure every man's interest, by commanding the observation of that great rule of equity, " whatsoever ye would " that men should do unto you, do ye even so to " them ;" by enjoining that truth and fidelity be inviolably observed in all our words, promises and contracts. And in order hereunto it requires the extirpation of all those passions and vices which render men unsociable and troublesom to one another, as pride, covetousness, and injustice, hatred and revenge and cruelty ; and those likewise which are not so commonly reputed vices, as self-conceit and peremptoriness in a man's own opinion, and all peevishness, and incompliance of humour in things lawful and indifferent.

And that these are the proper effects of true piety the doctrine of our Saviour and his apostles every where teacheth us. Now if this be the design of religion to bring us to this temper, thus to heal the natures of men and to sweeten their spirits, to correct their passions, and to mortify all those lusts which are the causes of enmity and division, then it is evident that in it's own nature it tends to the peace and happiness of human society ; and that if men would but live as religion requires they should do, the world would be a quiet habitation, a most lovely and desirable

SERM. III.

rable place in comparison of what now it is. And indeed the true reason why the societies of men are so full of tumult and disorder, so troublesom and tempestuous, is because there is so little of true religion among men; so that were it not for some small remainders of piety and virtue which are yet left scatter'd among mankind, human society would in a short space disband and run into confusion, the earth would grow wild and become a great forest, and mankind would become beasts of prey one towards another. And if this discourse hold true, surely then one would think that virtue should find it self a seat wherever human societies are, and that religion should be owned and encouraged in the world until men cease to be governed by reason.

II. I come to vindicate this truth from the insinuations and pretences of atheistical persons. I shall mention two.

1. That government may subsist well enough without the belief of a God and a state of rewards and punishments after this life.

2. That as for virtue and vice they are arbitrary things.

1. That government may subsist well enough without the belief of a God or a state of rewards and punishments after this life. And this the atheist does and must assert, otherwise he is by his own confession a declared enemy to government, and unfit to live in human society.

For answer to this, I will not deny but that though the generality of men did not believe any superior being, nor any rewards and punishments after this life, yet notwithstanding this there might be some kind

of

of government kept up in the world. For supposing men to have reason, the necessities of human nature and the mischiefs of confusion would probably compel them into some kind of order. But then I say withal, that if these principles were banished out of the world government would be far more difficult than now it is, because it would want it's firmest basis and foundation; there would be infinitely more disorders in the world if men were restrained from injustice and violence only by human laws, and not by principles of conscience and the dread of another world. Therefore magistrates have always thought themselves concerned to cherish religion, and to maintain in the minds of men the belief of a GOD and another life. Nay that common suggestion of atheistical persons, that religion was at first a politick device and is still kept up in the world as a state-engine to awe men into obedience, is a clear acknowledgment of the usefulness of it to the ends of government, and does as fully contradict that pretence of theirs which I am now confuting as any thing that can be said. SERM. III.

2. That virtue and vice are arbitrary things, founded only in the imaginations of men and in the constitutions and customs of the world, but not in the nature of the things themselves; and that that is virtue or vice, good or evil, which the supreme authority of a nation declares to be so. And this is frequently and confidently asserted by the ingenious author of a very bad book, I mean the Leviathan.

Now the proper way of answering any thing that is confidently asserted is to shew the contrary, namely, that there are some things that have a natural evil and deformity in them, as perjury, perfidiousness, unright-

SERM. III.

unrighteousness and ingratitude, which are things not only condemned by the positive laws and constitutions of particular nations and governments, but by the general verdict of human nature: and that the virtues contrary to these have a natural goodness and comeliness in them, and are suitable to the common principles and sentiments of humanity.

And this will most evidently appear by putting this supposition. Suppose the reverse of all that which we now call virtue were solemnly enacted, and the practice of fraud, and rapine, and perjury, and falseness to a man's word, and all manner of vice and wickedness were established by a law. I ask now, if the case between virtue and vice were thus altered, would that which we now call vice in process of time gain the reputation of virtue, and that which we now call virtue grow odious and contemptible to human nature? If it would not, then is there something in the nature of good and evil, of virtue and vice, which does not depend upon the pleasure of authority, nor is subject to any arbitrary constitution. But that it would not be thus I am very certain, because no government could subsist upon these terms. For the very enjoining of fraud and rapine and perjury and breach of trust doth apparently destroy the greatest end of government, which is to preserve men in their rights against the encroachments of fraud and violence. And this end being destroyed, human societies would presently fly in pieces and men would necessarily fall into a state of war. Which plainly shews that virtue and vice are not arbitrary things, but that there is a natural and immutable and eternal reason for that which we call goodness and virtue, and against that which we call vice and wickedness.

Thus

Thus I have endeavoured to evidence and vindicate this truth. I shall only draw an inference or two from this discourse, and so conclude. SERM. III.

1. If this discourse be true, then those who are in place of power and authority are peculiarly concerned to maintain the honour of religion.

2. It concerns every one to live in the practice of it.

1. Magistrates are concerned to maintain the honour of religion, which doth not only tend to every man's future happiness, but is the best instrument of civil government and of the temporal prosperity of a nation. For the whole design of it is to procure the private and publick happiness of mankind, and to restrain men from all those things which would make them miserable and guilty to themselves, unpeaceable and troublesom to the world. Religion hath so great an influence upon the felicity of men that it ought to be upheld, and the veneration of it maintained, not only out of a just dread of the divine vengeance in another world, but out of regard to the temporal peace and prosperity of men. It will requite all the kindness and honour we can do it by the advantages it will bring to civil government, and by the blessings it will draw down upon it. God hath promised that "those that honour him, he will honour," and in the common course of his providence he usually makes this good, so that the civil authority ought to be very tender of the honour of God and religion, if for no other reason yet out of reason of state.

It were to be wisht that all men were so piously dispos'd, that religion by it's own authority and the

2.

SERM. III.

reaſonable force of it might be ſufficient to eſtabliſh it's empire in the minds of men. But the corruptions of men will always make a ſtrong oppoſition againſt it. And therefore at the firſt planting of the Chriſtian religion in the world, GOD was pleaſed to accompany it with a miraculous power: but after it was planted this extraordinary power ceaſed, and GOD hath now left it to be maintained and ſupported by more ordinary and human ways, by the countenance of authority, and aſſiſtance of laws; which were never more neceſſary than in this degenerate age, which is prodigiouſly ſunk into atheiſm and prophaneneſs, and is running head-long into an humour of ſcoffing at GOD and religion and every thing that is ſacred. For ſome ages before the reformation atheiſm was confined to Italy, and had it's chief reſidence at Rome. All the mention that is of it in the hiſtory of thoſe times the papiſts themſelves give us in the lives of their own popes and cardinals, excepting two or three ſmall philoſophers, that were retainers to that court. So that this atheiſtical humour among Chriſtians was the ſpawn of the groſs ſuperſtitions and corrupt manners of the romiſh church and court. And indeed nothing is more natural than for extremes in religion to beget one another, like the vibrations of a pendulum, which the more violently you ſwing it one way the farther it will return the other. But in the laſt age, atheiſm travel'd over the Alpes and infected France, and now of late it hath croſſed the ſeas and invaded our nation and hath prevailed to amazement: for I do not think that there are any people in the world that are generally more indiſpoſed to it and can worſe brook it; ſerioufneſs and

zeal

zeal in religion being almoſt the natural temper of the Engliſh. So that nothing is to me matter of greater wonder, than that in a grave and ſober nation prophaneneſs ſhould ever come to gain ſo much ground, and the beſt and the wiſeſt religion in the world to be made the ſcorn of fools. For beſides the prophane and atheiſtical diſcourſes about GOD and religion, and the bold and ſenſleſs abuſes of this ſacred book the great inſtruments of our ſalvation, which are ſo frequent in the public places of reſort; I ſay, beſides theſe (I ſpeak it knowingly) a man can hardly paſs the ſtreets without having his ears grated and pierced with ſuch horrid and blaſphemous oaths and curſes as are enough, if we were guilty of no other ſin, to ſink a nation. And this not only from the tribe that wear liveries, but from thoſe that go before them and ſhould give better example. Is it not then high time that the laws ſhould provide by the moſt prudent and effectual means to curb theſe bold and inſolent defiers of heaven, who take a pride in being monſters, and boaſt themſelves in the follies and deformities of human nature? The heathens would never ſuffer their gods to be reviled, which yet were no gods. And ſhall it among the profeſſors of the true religion, be allowed to any man to make a mock of him that made heaven and earth, and to breathe out blaſphemies againſt him who gives us life and breath and all things? I doubt not but hypocriſy is a great wickedneſs and very odious to GOD, but by no means of ſo pernicious example as open prophaneneſs. Hypocriſy is a more modeſt way of ſinning, it ſhews ſome reverence to religion, and does ſo far own the worth and excellency of it as to acknow-

SERM. III.

SERM. III.

ledge that it deſerves to be counterfeited: whereas prophaneneſs declares openly againſt it, and endeavours to make a party to drive it out of the world.

2. It concerns every one to live in the practice of religion and virtue, becauſe the publick happineſs and proſperity depends upon it. It is moſt apparent that of late years religion is very ſenſibly declined among us. The manners of men have almoſt been univerſally corrupted by a civil war. We ſhould therefore all jointly endeavour to retrieve the ancient virtue of the nation, and to bring into faſhion again that ſolid and ſubſtantial, that plain and unaffected piety, (free from the extremes both of ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm) which flouriſhed in the age of our immediate forefathers. Which did not conſiſt in idle talk but in real effects, in a ſincere love of GOD and of our neighbour, in a pious devotion and reverence towards the divine majeſty, and in the virtuous actions of a good life; in the denial of "ungodlineſs and "worldly luſts, and in living ſoberly and righteouſly "and godly in this preſent world." This were the true way to reconcile GOD to us, to ſtop the courſe of his judgments, and to bring down the bleſſings of heaven upon us.

GOD hath now been pleaſed to ſettle us again in peace both at home and abroad, and he hath put us once more into the hands of our own counſel. Life and death, bleſſing and curſing, proſperity and deſtruction are before us. We may chuſe our own fortune, and if we be not wanting to our ſelves we may under the influence of GOD's grace and aſſiſtance, which are never wanting to our ſincere endeavours, become a happy and a proſperous people.

"The

" The good God make us all wise to know and SERM. IV.
" to do the things that belong to the temporal peace
" and prosperity of the nation, and to the eternal
" happiness and salvation of every one of our souls;
" which we humbly beg for the sake of Jesus
" Christ, to whom, &c."

SERMON IV.

The advantages of religion to particular persons.

PSALM xix. 11.

And in keeping of them there is great reward.

IN this psalm David celebrates the glory of God SERM. IV.
from the consideration of the greatness of his Works, and the perfection of his laws. From the greatness of his works, verse 1. " the heavens " declare the glory of God, and the firmament shew- " eth his handy-work," &c. From the perfection of his laws, verse 7. " the law of the Lord is perfect, " converting the soul," &c. And among many other excellencies of the divine laws, he mentions in the last place the benefits and advantages which come from the observance of them, verse 11. " and in keep- " ing of them there is great reward."

I have already shown how much religion tends to the

SERM. IV.

the publick welfare of mankind; to the support of government, and to the peace and happiness of human societies. My work at this time shall be to shew that religion and obedience to the laws of GOD do likewise conduce to the happiness of particular persons, both in respect of this world and the other. For though there be but little express mention made in the Old testament of the immortality of the soul and the rewards of another life, yet all religion does suppose these principles, and is built upon them.

I. And first, I shall endeavour to shew how religion conduceth to the happiness of this life; and that both in respect of the inward and outward man.

First, as to the mind; to be pious and religious brings a double advantage to the mind of man. 1. It tends to the improvement of our understandings. 2. It brings peace and pleasure to our minds.

1. It tends to the improvement of our understandings. I do not mean only that it instructs us in the knowledge of divine and spiritual things, and makes us to understand the great interest of our souls and the concernments of eternity better, but that in general it does raise and enlarge the minds of men and make them more capable of true knowledge. And in this sense I understand the following texts; "the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightning the eyes; the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, a good understanding have all they that keep his commandments; thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies," which plainly refers to political prudence; "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation; I understand

Psal. xix. 8.

Psal. cxi 10.

Psal. cxix. 98.

ver. 99.

" ſtand more than the ancients, becauſe I keep thy SERM. IV.
" precepts; through thy precepts I get underſtand-
" ing; the entrance of thy word giveth light, it giv- ver. 104.
" eth underſtanding to the ſimple." ver. 130.

Now religion doth improve the underſtandings of men by ſubduing their luſts, and moderating their paſſions. The luſts and paſſions of men do ſully and darken their minds, even by a natural influence. Intemperance and ſenſuality and fleſhly luſts do debaſe mens minds, and clog their ſpirits, make them groſs and foul, liſtleſs and unactive; they ſink us down into ſenſe, and glew us to theſe low and inferior things; like birdlime they hamper and entangle our ſouls, and hinder their flight upwards; they indiſpoſe and unfit our minds for the moſt noble and intellectual conſiderations. So likewiſe the exorbitant paſſions of wrath and malice, envy and revenge, do darken and diſtort the underſtandings of men, do tincture the mind with falſe colours, and fill it with prejudice and undue apprehenſions of things.

There is no man that is intemperate or luſtful, or paſſionate, but beſides the guilt he contracts which is continually fretting and diſquieting his mind, beſides the inconveniencies he brings upon himſelf as to his health, he does likewiſe ſtain and obſcure the brightneſs of his ſoul and the clearneſs of his diſcerning faculty. Such perſons have not that free uſe of their reaſon that they might have; their underſtandings are not bright enough, nor their ſpirits pure and fine enough for the exerciſe of the higheſt and nobleſt acts of reaſon. What clearneſs is to the eye, that purity is to our mind and underſtanding, and as the clearneſs of the bodily eye doth diſpoſe it for a quicker

ſight

ſight of material objects, ſo doth the purity of our minds, that is, freedom from luſt and paſſion, diſpoſe us for the cleareſt and moſt perfect acts of reaſon and underſtanding.

Now religion doth purify our minds and refine our ſpirits by quenching the fire of luſt and ſuppreſſing the fumes and vapours of it, and by ſcattering the clouds and miſts of paſſion. And the more any man's ſoul is cleanſed from the filth and dregs of ſenſual luſts the more nimble and expedite it will be in it's operations. The more any man conquers his paſſions, the more calm and ſedate his ſpirit is, and the greater equality he maintains in his temper, his apprehenſions of things will be the more clear and unprejudic'd, and his judgment more firm and ſteddy. And this is the meaning of that ſaying of Solomon, "he that is ſlow to wrath is of great underſtanding, but he that is haſty of ſpirit exalteth folly." *Ira furor brevis eſt*——Anger is a ſhort fit of madneſs, and he that is paſſionate and furious deprives himſelf of his reaſon, ſpoils his underſtanding, and helps to make himſelf a fool: whereas he that conquers his paſſions and keeps them under, doth thereby preſerve and improve his underſtanding. Freedom from irregular paſſions doth not only ſignify that a man is wiſe, but really contributes to the making of him ſuch.

2. Religion tends to the eaſe and pleaſure, the peace and tranquillity of our minds; wherein happineſs chiefly conſiſts, and which all the wiſdom and philoſophy of the world did always aim at, as the utmoſt felicity of this life. And that this is the natural fruit of a religious and virtuous courſe of life, the ſcripture

ture declares to us in these texts; "light is sown for "the righteous, and gladness for the upright in "heart; great peace have all they that love thy law, "and nothing shall offend them; her ways are ways "of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace; the "fruit of the righteousness is peace, and the effect "of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever;" the plain sense of which texts is, that pleasure and peace do naturally result from a holy and good life. When a man hath once engaged himself in a religious course, and is habituated to piety and holiness, all the exercises of religion and devotion, all acts of goodness and virtue are delightful to him. To honour and worship GOD, to pray to him, and to praise him, to study his will, to meditate upon him and to love him, all these bring great pleasure and peace along with them. What greater contentment and satisfaction can there be to the mind of man, when it is once purify'd and refin'd from the dregs of sensual pleasures and delights, and rais'd to it's true height and pitch, than to contemplate and admire the infinite excellencies and perfections of GOD, to adore his greatness and to love his goodness? How can the thoughts of GOD be troublesom to any one who lives soberly and righteously and godly in the world? No man that loves goodness and righteousness hath any reason to be afraid of GOD, or to be disquieted with the thoughts of him. There is nothing in GOD that is terrible to a good man, but all the apprehensions which we naturally have of him speak comfort and promise happiness to such a one. The consideration of his attributes is so far from being a trouble to him, that it is his recreation and delight. It is for wicked

SERM. IV.

Psal. xcvii. 11. Psal. cxix. 165. Prov. iii. 17. Isa. xxxii. 17.

3.

SERM. IV.

men to dread God, and to endeavour to baniſh the thoughts of him out of their minds; but a holy and virtuous man may have quiet and undiſturbed thoughts even of the juſtice of God, becauſe the terror of it doth not concern him.

Now religion doth contribute to the peace and quiet of our minds theſe two ways. Firſt, by allaying thoſe paſſions which are apt to ruffle and diſcompoſe our ſpirits. Malice and hatred, wrath and revenge are very fretting and vexatious and apt to make our minds ſore and uneaſy; but he that can moderate theſe affections will find a ſtrange eaſe and pleaſure in his own ſpirit. Secondly, by freeing us from the anxieties of guilt, and the fears of divine wrath and diſpleaſure; than which, nothing is more ſtinging and tormenting, and renders the life of man more miſerable and unquiet. Andwhat a ſpring of peace and joy muſt it needs be to apprehend upon good grounds that God is reconciled to us and become our friend; that all our ſins are perfectly forgiven, and ſhall never more be remembred againſt us! What unexpreſſible comfort does overflow the pious and devout ſoul, from the remembrance of a holy and well-ſpent life, and a conſcience of it's own innocency and integrity! And nothing but the practice of religion and virtue can give this eaſe and ſatisfaction to the mind of man. For there is a certain kind of temper and diſpoſition which is neceſſary to the pleaſure and quiet of our minds, and conſequently to our happineſs: and that is holineſs and goodneſs, which as it is the perfection ſo is it likewiſe the happineſs of the divine nature: and on the contrary the chief part of the miſery of wicked men, and of thoſe accurſed ſpirits the devils

is

is this, that they are of a disposition contrary to GOD; they are envious and malicious and cruel, and of such a temper as is naturally a torment and disquiet to it self. And here the foundation of hell is laid, in the evil disposition of men's minds; and till this be cured, which can only be done by religion, it is as impossible for a man to be happy, that is, pleased and contented within himself, as it is for a sick man to be ease. Because such a man hath that within him that torments him, and he cannot be at ease till that be removed. The man's spirit is out of order and off the hinges, and till that be put into it's right frame he will be perpetually disquieted and can find no rest within himself. The prophet very fitly describes to us the unquiet condition of wicked men, "the wicked is like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; there is no peace (saith my GOD) to the wicked." So long as sin and corruption abound in our hearts they will be restlesly working, like wine which will be in a perpetual motion and agitation till it have purged itself of it's dregs and foulness. SERM. IV. Isa. lvii. 20, 21.

Secondly, religion does likewise tend to the happiness of the outward man. Now the blessings of this kind are such as either respect our health, or estate, or reputation, or relations; and in respect of all these religion is highly advantageous to us.

1. As to our health, a religious and virtuous life doth eminently conduce to that, and to long life as a consequent of it. And in this sense I understand these following texts; "my son forget not my law, but let thy heart keep my commandments; for length of days, and long life, shall they add to thee;" and Prov. iii. 1, 2.

SERM. IV.

v. 7, and 8. " fear the LORD and depart from evil, " it shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy " bones;" and v. 16. among the temporal advantages of wisdom or religion this is mentioned as the first and principal, " length of days is in her right hand;" and v. 18. " she is a tree of life to them that lay hold " upon her;" and again, " whoso findeth me, find- " eth life, but he that sinneth against me wrongeth " his own soul;" (that is, is injurious to his own life) " all they that hate me love death;" all which is undoubtedly true in a spiritual sense, but is certainly meant by Solomon in the natural sense. And these promises, of the blessings of health and long life to good men, are not only declaratory of the good pleasure and intention of GOD towards them, but likewise of the natural tendency of the thing. For religion doth oblige men to the practice of those virtues which do in their own nature conduce to the preservation of our health, and the lengthning of our days; such as temperance and chastity and moderation of our passions. And the contrary vices to these do apparently tend to the impairing of men's health and the shortning of their days. How many have wasted and consumed their bodies by lust, and brought grievous pains and mortal diseases upon themselves. See how the wise man describes the sad consequences of this sin, " he goes as an ox to the slaughter, till " a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteneth " to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his " life;" and v. 25, 26, 27. " let not thy heart de- " cline to her ways, go not astray in her paths; for " she hath cast down many wounded; yea many " strong men have been slain by her; her house is the

Prov. viii. 35, 36.

Prov. vii. 22, 23.

" way to hell, (that is, to the grave) going down " to the chambers of death." How many have been ruined by intemperance and excess, and most unnaturally have perverted those blessings which GOD hath given for the support of nature to the overthrow and destruction of it? How often hath men's malice and envy and discontent against others terminated in a cruel revenge upon themselves? How many, by the wild fury and extravagancy of their own passions, have put their bodies into a combustion, and fired their spirits; and, by stirring up their rage and choler against others, have armed that fierce humour against themselves?

2. As to our estates, religion is likewise a mighty advantage to men in that respect. Not only in regard of GOD's more especial providence and peculiar blessing which usually attends good men in their undertakings, and crowns them with good success, but also from the nature of the thing. And this, I doubt not, is the meaning of those expressions of the wise man concerning the temporal benefits and advantages of wisdom or religion; " in her left hand are riches " and honour;" " they that love me shall inherit " substance, and I will fill their treasures." And this religion principally does, by charging men with truth and fidelity and justice in their dealings, which are a sure way of thriving, and will hold out when all fraudulent arts and devices will fail. And this also Solomon observes to us; " he that walketh uprightly " walketh surely, but he that perverteth his way shall " be known;" his indirect dealing will be discovered one time or other, and then he loses his reputation, and his interest sinks. Falshood and deceit only serve a present

Prov. iii. 16. Prov. viii. 21.

Prov. x. 6.

SERM. IV.

present turn, and the consequence of them is pernicious; but truth and fidelity are a lasting advantage;

Prov. x. 5. "the righteous hath an everlasting foundation;"

Prov. xii. 19. "the lip of truth is established for ever, but a lying "tongue is but for a moment." And religion does likewise engage men to diligence and industry in their callings, and how much this conduces to the advancement of men's fortunes daily experience teaches, and

Prov. x. 4. the wise man hath told us, "the diligent hand makes

Pro. xxii. 29. "rich;" and again, "seest thou a man diligent in "business, he shall stand before princes, he shall not "stand before mean persons.

And where men, by reason of the difficult circumstances of their condition, cannot arrive to any eminency of estate, yet religion makes a compensation for this by teaching men to be contented with that moderate and competent fortune which God hath given them. For the shortest way to be rich is not by enlarging our estates, but by contracting our desires. What Seneca says of philosophy, is much more true of religion, *præstat opes sapientia, quas cuicunque fecit supervacuas dedit*, it makes all those rich to whom it makes riches superfluous, and they are so to those who are taught by religion to be contented with such a portion of them as God's providence hath thought fit to allot to them.

3. As to our reputation. There is nothing gives a man a more firm and established reputation among wise and serious persons (whose judgment is only valuable) than a prudent and substantial piety. This doth many times command reverence and esteem from the worser sort of men, and such as are no great friends to religion; and sometimes the force of truth will extort

tort an acknowledgment of it's excellency, even from it's greatest enemies. I know very well that good men may, and often do, blemish the reputation of their piety by over-acting some things in religion; by an indiscreet zeal about things wherein religion is not concerned, by an ungrateful austerity and sourness which religion doth not require; by little affectations, and an imprudent ostentation of devotion; but a substantial and solid, a discreet and unaffected piety, which makes no great noise and show, but expresses it self in a constant and serious devotion, and is accompained with the fruits of goodness and kindness and righteousness towards men, will not only give a man a credit and value among the sober and the virtuous, but even among the vicious and more degenerate sort of men. Upon this account it is that the apostle adviseth Christians, if they would recommend themselves to the esteem of God and men, earestly to mind the weighty and substantial parts of religion; "let not then your good be evil spoken of; "for the kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, "but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy "Ghost; for he that in these things serveth Christ, "is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

It is true indeed, there are some persons of so profligate a temper, and of such an inveterate enmity to all goodness, as to scorn and reproach even religion and virtue it self. But the reproach of such persons does not really wound a man's reputation. For why should any man be troubled at the contumelies of those whose judgment deserves not to be valued, who despise goodness and good men out of malice and ignorance? If these reproaches which they cast upon them

them were the censures of wise and sober men, a man's reputation might be concern'd in them; but they are the rash words of inconsiderate and injudicious men, the extravagant speeches of those who are unexperienc'd in the things they speak against; and therefore no wise man will be troubled at them, or think either religion or himself disparaged by them.

4. As to our relations. Religion also conduceth to the happiness of these, as it derives a large and extensive blessing upon all that belongs to us; the goodness of GOD being so diffusive as to scatter his blessings "round about the habitations of the just, "and to shew mercy unto thousands of them that love "him, and keep his commandments. So David tells us," Psal. cxii. 1, 2, 3. "blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, and de- "lighteth greatly in his commandments; his seed "shall be mighty upon earth, the generation of the "upright shall be blessed; wealth and riches are in "his house, and his righteousness endureth for ever." Prov. xiii. 22. And so Solomon; "a good man leaveth an inheri- "tance to his childrens children; "and again," in Prov. xiv. 26. "the fear of the LORD is strong confidence, and his "children shall have a place of refuge." But the wicked derives a curse upon all that is related to him, he is said "to trouble his own house; and again, Prov. xi. 29. "the wicked are overthrown and are not, but the "righteous shall stand. Prov. xii. 7.

But setting aside the consideration of GOD's providence, religion doth likewise in it's own nature tend to the welfare of those who are related to us; because it lays the strictest obligations upon men to take care of their families and relations, and to make the best provision both for their comfortable subsistence here

in

in this world and their salvation in the next. And those who neglect these duties, the scripture is so far from esteeming them Christians that it accounts them worse than heathens and infidels, "he that provideth "not for his own, especially those of his own house, "is worse than an infidel, and hath deny'd the faith." This I know is spoken in respect of temporal provision, but it holds *à fortiori* as to the care of their souls. SERM. IV. 1 Tim. v. 8.

Besides, it is many times seen that the posterity of holy and good men, especially of such as have evidenced their piety towards God by bounty and charity to men, have met with unusual kindness and respect from others, and have by a strange and secret disposition of divine providence been unexpectedly car'd and provided for; and that, as they have all the reason in the world to believe, upon the account and for the sake of the piety and charity of their parents. This David tells us from his own particular observation; "I have been young, and now am "old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, "nor his seed begging bread." And that by the righteous is here meant the good and merciful man, appears from the description of him in the next words, "he is ever merciful and lendeth, and his seed is bles- "sed." And on the contrary, the posterity of the wicked do many times inherit the fruit of their fathers sins and vices; and that not only by a just judgment of God, but from the natural course and consequence of things. And in this sense that expression in Job is often verify'd, that "God lays up the iniquity of "wicked men for their children." And doth not experience testify that the intemperate and unjust do Psalm. xxxvii. 25. Ver. 26. Job. xxi. 19.

3.

many times transmit their bodily infirmities and diseases to their children, and entail a secret curse upon their estates, which does either insensibly waste and consume it, or eat out the heart and comfort of it? Thus you see how religion in all respects conduces to the happiness of this life.

II. Religion and virtue do likewise most certainly and directly tend to the eternal happiness and salvation of men in the other world. And this is incomparably the greatest advantage that redounds to men by being religious, in comparison of which all temporal considerations are less than nothing and vanity. The worldly advantages that religion brings to men in this present life are a sensible recommendation of religion, even to the lowest and meanest spirits: But to those who are rais'd above sense and aspire after immortality, who believe the perpetual duration of their souls and the resurrection of their bodies; to those who are throughly convinc'd of the inconsiderableness of this short dying life, and of all the concernments of it, in comparison of that eternal state which remains for us in another life; to these, I say, the consideration of a future happiness, and of those unspeakable and everlasting rewards which shall then be given to holiness and virtue, is certainly the most powerful motive and the most likely to prevail upon them. For those, who are persuaded that they shall continue for ever, cannot chuse but aspire after a happiness commensurate to their duration, nor can any thing that is conscious to it's self of it's own immortality be satisfied and contented with any thing less than the hopes of an endless felicity. And this hope religion alone gives men, and the Christian religion only

only can settle men in a firm and unshaken assurance of it. But because all men who have entertain'd any religion have consented to these principles, of the "immortality of the soul" and the "recompences "of another world," and have always promis'd to themselves some rewards of piety and virtue after this life; and because I did more particularly design from this text to speak of the temporal benefits and advantages which redound to men from religion, therefore I shall content myself to shew very briefly how a religious and virtuous life doth conduce to our future happiness. And that upon these two accounts; from the promise of GOD, and from the nature of the thing. SERM. IV.

1. From the promise of GOD. "Godliness (saith the apostle) "hath the promise of the life that is to "come." GOD hath all along in the scripture suspended the promise of eternal life upon this condition. He hath peremptorily declar'd that without obedience and holiness of life no man shall ever see the LORD. And this very thing, that it is the constitution and appointment of GOD, might be argument enough to us (if there were no other) to convince us of the necessity of obeying the laws of GOD in order to our happiness, and to persuade us thereunto. For eternal life is the gift of GOD, and he may do what he will with his own. He is master of his own favours and may dispense them upon what terms and conditions he pleases. But it is no hard condition that he hath imposed upon us. If religion brought no advantages to us in this world, yet the happiness of heaven is so great as will abundantly recompence all our pains and endeavours; there is temptation e- 1 Tim. iv. 8.

enough in the reward to engage any man in the work. Had God thought fit to have imposed the most grievous and difficult things upon us, ought we not to have submitted to them and to have undertaken them with cheerfulness upon such great and glorious encouragements? As Naaman's servants said to him in another case, "had he bid thee do some great "thing wouldest thou not have done it? So if God had said that without poverty and actual martyrdom "no man shall see the Lord," would not any man that believes heaven and hell and understands what these words signify, and what it is to escape extreme and eternal misery, and to enjoy unspeakable and endless glory, have been willing to accept these conditions? "how much more, when he hath on-"ly said, wash and be clean;" and "let every man "that hath this hope in him, purify himself as he "is pure?" But God hath not dealt thus with us, nor is the imposing of this condition of eternal life a mere arbitrary constitution; therefore I shall endeavour to shew,

2dly, That a religious and holy life doth, from the very nature and reason of the thing, conduce to our future happiness, by way of necessary disposition and preparation of us for it. We cannot be otherwise happy, but by our conformity to God, without this we cannot possibly love him nor find any pleasure or happiness in communion with him. For we cannot love a nature contrary to our own, nor delight to converse with it. Therefore religion, in order to the fitting of us for the happiness of the next life, does design to mortify our lusts and passions, and to restrain us from the inordinate love of the gross and sensual

delights

delights of this world; to call off our minds from these inferior things and to raise them to higher and more spiritual objects, that we may be disposed for the happiness of the other world, and taught to relish the delights of it: whereas should we set our hearts only upon these things, and be able to taste no pleasure in any thing but what is sensual and earthly, we must needs be extremely miserable when we come into the other world; because we should meet with nothing to entertain our selves withal, no employment suitable to our disposition, no pleasure that would agree with our depraved appetites and vicious inclinations. All that heaven and happiness signifies is unsuitable to a wicked man, and therefore could be no felicity to him. But this I shall have occasion to speak more fully to in my next discourse.

From all that hath been said, the reasonableness of religion clearly appears, which tends so directly to the happiness of men, and is upon all accounts calculated for our benefit. Let but all things be truly considered and cast up and it will be found that there is no advantage to any man from an irreligious and vicious course of life. I challenge any one to instance in any real benefit that ever came to him this way. Let the sinner declare what he hath found by experience. Hath lewdness and intemperance been more for his health than if he had liv'd chastly and soberly? Hath falshood and injustice proved at the long run more for the advancement and security of his estate, than truth and honesty would have done? Hath any vice that he hath lived in made him more true friends, and gained him a better reputation in the world than the practice of holiness and virtue would

have

SERM. IV.

have done? Hath he found that peace and satisfaction of mind in an evil course, and that quiet enjoyment of himself, and comfortable assurance of God's favour, and good hopes of his future condition, which a religious and virtuous life would have given him? Nay on the contrary, have not some of his vices weakened his body and broken his health, have not others dissipated his estate, and reduced him to want? What notorious vice is there that doth not blemish a man's reputation, and make him either hated or despised, and that not only by the wise and the virtuous, but even by the generality of men? But was ever any wicked man free from the stings of a guilty conscience and the torment of a restless and uneasy mind, from the secret dread of divine displeasure, and of the vengeance of another world? Let the sinner freely speak the very inward sense of his soul in this matter, and spare not; and I doubt not, if he will deal clearly and impartially, but that he will acknowledge all this to be true, and is able to confirm it from his own sad experience. For this is the natural fruit of sin and the present revenge which it takes upon sinners, besides that fearful punishment which shall be inflicted on them in another life.

What reason then can any man pretend against religion, when it is so apparently for the benefit not only of human society, but of every particular person; when there is no real interest of this world but may ordinarily be as effectually promoted and pursued to as great advantage, nay usually to far greater, by a man that "lives soberly and righteously and godly "in the world," than by any one that leads the contrary course of life? Let no man then say, with those

prophane

prophane persons whom the prophet speaks of, "It "is in vain to serve the LORD, and what profit is it "that we have kept his Commandments?" GOD has not been so hard a master to us that we have reason thus to complain of him. He hath given us no laws but what are for our good, nay so gracious hath he been to us as to link together our duty and our interest, and to make those very things the instances of our obedience which are the natural means and causes of our happiness. The devil was so far in the right, when he charged Job that he did not "serve GOD "for nought." 'Tis he himself that is the hard master and makes men serve him for nought, who rewards his drudges and slaves with nothing but shame and sorrow and misery. But GOD requires no man's service upon hard and unreasonable terms. The greatest part of our work is a present reward to it self, and for whatever else we do or suffer for him, he offers us abundant consideration. And if men did but truly and wisely love themselves they would upon this very ground, if there were no other, become religious. For when all is done there is no man can serve his own interest better than by serving GOD. Religion conduceth both to our present and future happiness, and when the gospel chargeth us with piety towards GOD, and justice and charity towards men, and temperance and chastity in reference to our selves, the true interpretation of these laws is this, GOD requires of men in order to their eternal happiness that they should do those things which tend to their temporal welfare, that is, in plainer words, he promises to make us happy for ever upon condition that we will but do that which is best for our selves in this

SERM. IV.

Mal. iii. 14.

SERM. IV.

world. To conclude, religion is founded in the intereſt of men rightly apprehended. So that if the god of this world and the luſts of men did not blind their eyes, ſo as to render them unfit to diſcern their true intereſt, it would be impoſſible, ſo long as men love themſelves, and deſire their own happineſs, to keep them from being religious; for they could not but conclude that to be their intereſt, and being ſo convinced they would reſolve to purſue it and ſtick to it.

SERMON V.

The excellency of the Chriſtian religion.

PHIL. iii. 8.

Yea doubtleſs, and I count all things but loſs for the excellency of the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus my Lord.

SERM. V.

IN the beginning of this chapter the apoſtle makes a compariſon between the Jewiſh and the Chriſtian religion, and ſhews the Chriſtian to be in truth and ſubſtance what the Jewiſh was only in type and ſhadow, v. 3. "We are the circumciſion "which worſhip GOD in the ſpirit." And then he enumerates the ſeveral privileges he was partaker of by virtue of his being born in the Jewiſh church, v. 4, 5, 6. "Though I might alſo have confidence in the "fleſh, if any other man thinketh that he hath where-

"of

" of he might trust in the flesh, I more ; circumcis- SERM. V.
" ed the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, &c." And yet he tells us he was contented to forego all these advantages for CHRIST and the Christian religion, v. 7. " but what things were gain to me those I count-
" ed loss for CHRIST." And not only these, but if there were any thing else that men value in this world he was willing to hazard that also upon the same account, v. 8. " yea doubtless, and I count all things
" but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of
" CHRIST JESUS my LORD.

In which words the apostle declares the high esteem he had for the Christian religion, which he calls the knowledge of CHRIST JESUS his LORD; the excellency whereof appeared so great to him, that he valued nothing in comparison of the advantages which he had by the knowledge of it.

My design at this time from this text is, to represent the excellency of this knowledge of the Christian religion above that of any other religion or institution in the world. And here I shall not consider the external evidence which we have of the truth of Christianity, and of the divinity of it's doctrine, in which respect it hath incomparably the advantage of any other religion; but only the internal excellency of the doctrine it self, abstracting from the divine authority of it: and that in these four respects:

First, as it does more clearly reveal to us the nature of GOD, which is the great foundation of all religion.

Secondly, as it gives us a more certain and perfect law for the government of our lives.

Thirdly, as it propounds to us more powerful arguments to persuade men to the obedience of this law.

Fourthly, as it furnishes us with better motives and considerations to patience and contentedness under the evils and afflictions of this life. Now these are the greatest advantages that any religion can have, to give men right apprehensions of GOD, a perfect rule of good life, and efficacious arguments to persuade men to be good, and patiently to bear the evils and sufferings of this life. And these shall be the heads of my following discourse.

I. The Christian religion doth more clearly reveal to us the nature of GOD, than any religion ever did. And to have right apprehensions of GOD is the great foundation of all religion. For according as men's notions of GOD are, such will their religion be. If men have gross and false conceptions of GOD their religion will be absurd and superstitious. If men fancy GOD to be an ill-natured being armed with infinite power, one that delights in the misery and ruin of his creatures and is ready to take all advantages against them, they may fear him but they will hate him; and they will be apt to be such towards one another as they fancy GOD to be towards them, for all religion doth naturally incline men to imitate him whom they worship.

Now the Christian religion gives us a more perfect, and a more lovely character of GOD, than any religion ever did. It represents him to us as a pure spirit, (which the heathens did not generally believe) and that he is to be worship'd in such a manner as is most suitable to his spiritual nature, (which not only the heathens but even the Jews themselves were extremely

extremely miſtaken about) "GOD is a ſpirit (ſays our "SAVIOUR) and they that worſhip him, muſt wor- "ſhip him in ſpirit and in truth." It is true indeed GOD himſelf did command ſacrifices to the Jews, and all thoſe external and troubleſom obſervances of which their religion did conſiſt: but then it is to be conſidered, that he did not inſtitute this way of worſhip becauſe it was moſt ſuitable to his own nature, but becauſe of the carnality of their hearts and the proneneſs of that people to idolatry. GOD did not preſcribe theſe things becauſe they were beſt, but becauſe the temper of that people would then admit of nothing better. And this the ſcripture gives us ſeveral intimations of, "thou deſireſt not ſacrifice, thou delight- "eſt not in burnt-offerings," ſaith David: and elſewhere more expreſly to this purpoſe; "I ſpake not "unto your fathers (ſays GOD by the prophet Jeremiah) "nor commanded them, in the day that I "brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, con- "cerning burnt-offerings and ſacrifices; but this "thing commanded I them, ſaying, obey my voice:" A ſufficient intimation that GOD did not primarily intend to appoint this way of worſhip, and to impoſe it upon them as that which was moſt proper and agreeable to him, but that he condeſcended to it as moſt accommodate to their preſent ſtate and inclination. And in this ſenſe alſo ſome underſtand what GOD ſays to the ſame people by the prophet Ezekiel, that he "gave them ſtatutes that were not good."

SERM. V.

Pſa. li. 16.

Jer. vii. 22.

Ezek. xx. 25.

And as the Chriſtian religion gives a more perfect, ſo a more amiable and lovely character of the divine nature. No religion that ever was in the world does ſo fully repreſent the goodneſs of GOD and his ten-

SERM. V.

der love to mankind, which is the best and most powerful argument to the love of GOD. The heathens did generally dread GOD, and looked upon him as fierce and cruel and revengeful; and therefore they endeavoured to appease him by the horrid and barbarous sacrifices of men, and of their own children. And all along in the old testament GOD is generally represented as very strict and severe. But there are no where so plain and full declarations of his mercy and love to the sons of men as are made in the gospel. In the old testament GOD is usually styled "the "LORD of Hosts, the great and the terrible GOD:" but in the new testament he is represented to us by milder titles, "the GOD and father of our LORD JE-"SUS CHRIST, the father of mercies, and the GOD "of all consolations; the GOD of all patience, the "GOD of love and peace;" nay he is said to be love "and peace;" nay he is said to be love it self and to dwell in love. And this difference between the style of the old and new testament is so remarkable, that one of the greatest sects in the primitive church (I mean that of the Gnosticks) did upon this very ground found their heresy of two GODS; the one evil and fierce and cruel, whom they called the GOD of the old testament; the other good and kind and merciful, whom they called the GOD of the new. So great a difference is there between the representations which are made of GOD in the books of the Jewish and the Christian religion, as to give at least some colour and pretenes for an imagination of two GODS.

II. Christian religion hath given us a more certain and perfect law for the government of our lives. It

hath

hath made our duty more plain and certain in many instances, than either the philosophy of the heathen, or the precepts of Moses had done. It commands universal love and kindness and good will among men, a readiness to forgive our greatest enemies, "to do "good to them that hate us, to bless them that curse "us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us "and persecute us." And does inculcate these precepts more vehemently, and forbid malice and hatred and revenge and contention more strictly and peremptorily than any religion ever did before; as will appear to any one that does but attentively read our SAVIOUR'S sermon upon the mount.

And as Christianity hath given us a more certain so likewise a more perfect law for the government of our lives. All the precepts of it are reasonable and wise, requiring such duties of us as are suitable to the light of nature and do approve themselves to the best reason of mankind; such as have their foundation in the nature of GOD, and are an imitation of the divine excellencies; such as tend to the perfection of human nature and to raise the minds of men to the highest pitch of goodness and virtue. The laws of our religion are such as are generally useful and beneficial to the world, as do tend to the outward peace and the health, to the inward comfort and contentment, and to the universal happiness of mankind. They command nothing that is unnecessary and burthensom, as were the numerous rites and ceremonies of the Jewish religion, but what is reasonable, and useful, and substantial: and they omit nothing that may tend to the glory of GOD or the welfare of men, nor do they restrain us in any thing but what is contrary either to

the

the regular inclinations of nature or to our reason and true interest. They forbid us nothing but what is base and unworthy, to serve our humours and passions, to reproach our understandings and to make our selves fools and beasts; in a word, nothing but what tends either to our private harm and prejudice, or to publick disorder and confusion.

And that this is the tenor of the laws of the gospel will appear to any one from our SAVIOUR's sermons and discourses: particularly that upon the mount; wherein he charges his disciples and followers to be humble, and meek, and righteous, and merciful, and pure, and peaceable, and patient under sufferings and persecutions, and good and kind to all even to those that are evil and injurious to us, and to endeavour to excel in all goodness and virtue. This will appear likewise from the writings of the holy Apostles; I will instance but in some few passages in them. St. Paul represents to us the design of the Christian doctrine in a very few words, but of admi-

Tit. ii. 11, 12. rable sense and weight; "The grace of GOD, that "bringeth salvation hath appear'd to all men, teach- "ing us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts "we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly "in this present world." The same apostle makes this the main and fundamental condition of the co-

2 Tim. ii. 19. venant of the gospel on our part, "let every one "that names the name of CHRIST depart from ini- "quity." St. James describes the christian doctrine (which he calls "the wisdom that is from above")

James iii. 17. by these characters, "It is first pure, then peaceable, "gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and "good fruits, without partiality, and without hy-

" pocrisy." St. Peter calls the gospel, " the know- SERM.
" ledge of him that hath called us to glory and vir- V.
" tue; whereby (saith he) are given unto us ex- 2 Pet. i. 3,
" ceeding great and precious promises, that by these 4.
" you might be partakers of a divine nature, having
" escap'd the corruption that is in the world through
" lust;" and upon this consideration he exhorts them
" to give all diligence to add to their faith" the se- v. 5, 6, 7.
veral virtues of a good life, without which he tells
them " they are barren and unfruitful in the know-
" ledge of our LORD JESUS CHRIST." I will con-
clude with that full and comprehensive passage of St.
Paul to the Philippians, " whatsoever things are true, Phil. iv. 8.
" whatsoever things are honest, (ὅσα σεμνὰ, what-
soever things are of venerable esteem) " whatsoever
" things are just, whatsoever things are pure, (or
chast) " whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever
" things are of good report, if there be any virtue,
" if there be any praise, think on these things."

But the perfection and the reasonableness of the laws of Christianity will most plainly appear by taking a brief survey of them. And they may all be referr'd to these two general heads. They are either such as tend to the perfection of human nature and to make men singly and personally good, or such as tend to the peace and happiness of human society.

First, such as tend to the perfection of human nature and to make men good singly and personally consider'd. And the precepts of this kind may be distributed likewise into two sorts, such as enjoin piety towards GOD, or such as require the good order and government of our selves in respect of the enjoyments and pleasures of this life.

1. Such

1. Such as enjoin piety towards God. All the duties of Christian religion which respect God are no other but what natural light prompts men to, excepting the two sacraments (which are of great use and significancy in the Christian religion) and praying to God in the name and by the mediation of Jesus Christ. For the sum of natural religion as it refers more immediately to God is this, that we should inwardly reverence and love God, and that we should express our inward reverence and love to him by external worship and adoration, and by our readiness to receive and obey all the revelations of his will: And that we should testify our dependance upon him, and our confidence of his goodness, by constant prayers and supplications to him for mercy and help for our selves and others; and that we should acknowledge our obligations to him for the many favours and benefits, which every day and every minute we receive from him, by continual praises and thanksgivings: And that on the contrary we should not entertain any unworthy thoughts of God, nor give that honour and reverence which is due to him, to any other; that we should not worship him in any manner that is either unsuitable to the excellency and perfection of his nature, or contrary to his revealed will; that we should carefully avoid the prophane and irreverent use of his name, by cursing, or customary swearing, and take heed of the neglect or contempt of his worship or any thing belonging to it. This is the sum of the first part of natural religion, and these are the general heads of those duties which every man's reason tells him he owes to God: And these are the very things which the Christian religion does expressly require

require of us, as might be evidenced from particular texts in the new testament. So that there is nothing in this part of Christianity but what agrees very well with the reason of mankind. SERM. V.

2. Such precepts as require the good order and government of our selves in respect of the pleasures and enjoyments of this life. Christian religion commands whatsoever things are pure and chaste, all manner of sobriety and temperance and moderation in reference to our appetites and passions; and forbids whatever is unnatural, and unreasonable, and unhealthful, in the use of pleasures and of any of GOD's creatures. Hither belong all those texts which require of us that we should "not walk after the "flesh but after the spirit," that we should "cleanse "our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit," that we should "be holy in all manner of conversa- "tion. St. John distributes the lusts and irregular appetites of men into three kinds, voluptuousness, covetousness, and ambition, answerable to the three sorts of tempting objects that are in the world, pleasures, riches, and honours, "All that is in the world, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the "pride of life, &c." And Christianity doth strictly forbid all these," "take heed and beware of cove- "tousness (says our SAVIOUR, and he adds this excellent reason) "for a man's life consisteth not in the "abundance of the things which he possesseth." It forbids pride and ambition and vain glory, and commands humility and modesty and condescension to others; "learn of me (says our SAVIOUR) "for "I am meek and lowly in spirit; mind not high "things, but condescend to them that are of low

Rom. viii. 1. 2 Cor. vii. 1. 1 Pet. i. 15. 1 Joh. ii. 16. Luke xii. 15. Mat. xi. 29. Rom. xii. 16.

3.

SERM. V.

Phil. ii. 3. " degree; let nothing be done through vain glory, but in " lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than " themselves." And in reference to sensual pleasures it forbids all irregularity and excess, and strictly en-

Luke xxi. 36. joins purity and temperance; cautioning us " to take " heed lest we be overcharged with surfeiting and

Rom. xiii. 13. " drunkenness;" charging us " to walk decently as in " the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in

1 Pet. ii. 11. " chambering and wantonness; to abstain from fleshly " lusts which war against the soul." Now all these precepts do not only tend to beget in us such virtues and dispositions as are reasonable and suitable to our nature and every way for our temporal convenience and advantage, but such as do likewise exceedingly dispose us to piety and religion by purifying our souls from the dross and filth of sensual delights. For covetousness debaseth a man's spirit, and sinks it into the earth; intemperance and lust cloud a man's understanding, and indispose it for the contemplation of things spiritual and divine. Thus you see how the precepts of Christianity do tend to the perfection of human nature, considering men singly and personally.

Secondly, the other sort of precepts are such as tend to the peace and happiness of human society. And the reason of mankind can devise nothing more proper to this end than the laws of Christianity are. For they command all those virtues which are apt to sweeten the spirits and allay the passions and animosities of men one towards another. They require us " to love our neighbour (that is every man in the world, even our greatest enemies) " as our selves." And for this end among others was the sacrament of the

the LORD's supper, the feast of love, instituted: that by commemorating the love of our dying SAVIOUR, who laid down his life for his enemies, we might be put in mind how we ought to love one another. SERM. V.

And by this law of loving all men, even our enemies, the Christian religion discovers it self not only to be the most innocent and harmless, but the most generous and best-natured institution that ever was in the world. For in pursuance of this general precept it commands us, "to do good to all men; if it be "possible, and as much as in us lies to live peaceably "with all men;" to be "kind one to another," ready to gratify and oblige men; to be tender-hearted and compassionate towards those that are in want or misery, and ready to supply and relieve them; to sympathize with one another in our joys and sorrows, "to "mourn with those that mourn, and to rejoice with "them that rejoice; to bear one another's burdens, "and to forbear one another in love;" to be easily reconciled to them that have offended us, and to be ready to forgive from our hearts the greatest injuries that can be done to us, and that without bounds and limits even to seventy times seven; as our SAVIOUR expresseth it.

The laws of Christianity do likewise secure both the private interests of men and the publick peace, by confirming and enforcing all the dictates of nature concerning justice and equity, and our doing to others as we would have them to do to us; and by commanding obedience to human laws which decide men's rights and submission to government under pain of damnation: and by forbiding whatever is contrary to these, violence and oppression, defrauding and over-

SERM. V.

reaching one another, perfidiousness and treachery, breach of trusts, oaths, or promises, undutifulness to superiors, sedition and rebellion against magistracy and authority: and if there be any thing else that is apt to disturb the peace of the world, and to alienate the affections of men from one another, as sourness of dispositon, and rudeness of behaviour, censoriousness and sinister interpretation of things, all cross and distastful humours, and whatever else may render the conversation of men grievous, and uneasy to one another: all these are either expressly, or by clear consequence and deduction, forbidden in the new testament.

And now what could any religion do more towards the reforming of the dispositions and manners of men? what laws can be devised more proper and effectual to advance the nature of man to it's highest perfection, to procure the tranquillity of men's minds, and the peace and happiness of the world, than these precepts of Christianity are? several of which (as those of loving our enemies, of not revenging injuries, of rendring good for evil, &c.) though they have been esteemed reasonable by some of the wisest among the heathen, yet by reason of the degeneracy of the world, and of the obscurity and uncertainty of human reason, they never obtained to have the estimation and force of natural laws. So that we owe to Christianity the discovery of the most certain and perfect rule of life that ever the world was acquainted with all.

III. Christian religion propounds the most powerful arguments to persuade men to the obedience of these laws. The gospel offers such considerations to

us,

us, as are fit to work very forcibly upon two of the most swaying and governing passions in the mind of man, our hopes and our fears. To encourage our hopes it gives us the highest assurance of the greatest and most lasting happiness, in case of obedience; and to awaken our fear it threatens sinners with the most dreadful and durable torments, in case of disobedience. "To them who by patient continuance Rom. ii. "in well doing seek for glory and honour and im- 7, 8. "mortality," it promiseth "eternal life: but unto "them that obey not the truth, but obey unrighte- "ousness," it threatens "indignation and wrath, tri- "bulation and anguish." And this is that which makes the doctrine of the gospel so powerful an instrument for the reforming of the world, that it proposes to men such glorious rewards and such terrible punishments as no religion ever did; and to make the consideration of them more effectual, it gives us far greater assurance of the reality, and certainty of these things than ever the world had before. This account the apostle gives us of the success and efficacy of the gospel upon the minds of men, and for this reason he calls it "the power of God unto salvation," Rom. i. because therein "the wrath of God is revealed from 16, 18. "heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness "of men." Before the revelation of the gospel the wickedness and impenitency of the heathen world was a much more excusable thing, because they were in a great measure ignorant of the rewards of another life, and had generally but very uncertain and obscure apprehensions of those things which urge men most powerfully to forsake their sins, and are the most prevalent arguments to a good life. So St. Paul tells

the

SERM. V.

the Athenians, the most knowing among the heathen, "the times of this ignorance GOD winked at, but Act. xvii. 30, 31. "now commandeth all men every where to repent; "because he hath appointed a day in the which he "will judge the world in righteousness by that man "whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given "assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him "from the dead." The resurrection of JESUS CHRIST from the dead hath given the world that full assurance of another life after this and of a future judgment, which it never had before, for he whom GOD Act. x. 42. raised from the dead did declare and testify that "it "was he who was ordained of GOD to be the judge "of quick and dead." And the firm belief of a future judgment, which shall "render to every man "according to his deeds," if it be well considered, is to a reasonable nature the most forcible motive of all other to a good life; because it is taken from the consideration of the greatest and most lasting happiness and misery that human nature is capable of. So that the laws of Christianity have the firmest sanction of any laws in the world to secure the obedience and observance of them: for what can restrain men from sin if the terrors of the LORD and the evident danger of eternal destruction will not? What encouragement can be given to goodness beyond the hopes of heaven and the assurance of an endless felicity?

IV. The Christian religion furnisheth us with the best motives and considerations to patience and contentedness under the evils and afflictions of this life. This was one great design of philosophy, to support men under the evils and calamities which this life is incident to, and to fortify their spirits against sufferings.

ings. And to this end the wisest among the heathens rack'd their wits and cast about every way, they advanced all sorts of principles and managed every little argument and consideration to the utmost advantage. And yet after all these attempts they have not been able to give any considerable comfort and ease to the mind of man under any of the great evils and pressures of this life. "The bed is shorter than that "a man can stretch himself upon it, and the cover- "ing narrower than that a man can wrap himself in "it." All the wise sayings and advices which philosophers could muster up to this purpose have proved ineffectual to the common people and the generality of mankind, and have help'd only to support some few stout and obstinate minds, which without the assistance of philosophy would have held up pretty well of themselves.

Some of the philosophers have run so far back for arguments of comfort against pain as to call every thing into question, and to doubt whether there were any such thing as sense or pain. And yet for all that when any great evil has been upon them, they would certainly sigh and groan as pitifully and cry out as loud as other men.

Others have sought to ease themselves of all the evil of affliction by disputing subtilly against it, and pertinaciously maintaining that afflictions are no real evils, but only in opinion and imagination, and therefore a wise man ought not to be troubled at them. But he must be a very wise man that can forbear being troubled at things that are very troublesom. And yet thus Possidonius (as Tully tells us) distinguished, he could not deny pain to be very troublesom, but for

all

all that he was resolved never to acknowledge it to be an evil. But sure it is a very slender comfort that relies upon this nice distinction between things being troublesom and being evils, when all the evil of affliction lies in the trouble it creates to us. But when the best that can be is made of this argument, it is good for nothing but to be thrown away as a stupid paradox and against the common sense of mankind.

Others have endeavoured to delude their trouble by a graver way of reasoning, that these things are fatal and necessary and therefore no body ought to be troubled at them, it being in vain to be troubled at that which we cannot help. And yet perhaps it might as reasonably be said on the other side that this very consideration, that a thing cannot be help'd, is one of the justest causes of trouble to a wise man. For it were some kind of comfort if these evils were to be avoided, because then we might be careful to prevent them another time; but if they be necessary then my trouble is as fatal as the calamity that occasions it; and though I know it in vain to be troubled for that which I cannot help, yet I cannot chuse but be afflicted. It was a smart reply that Augustus made to one that ministred this comfort to him of the fatality of things, *Hoc ipsum est* (says he) *quod me male habet*, this was so far from giving any ease to his mind that "this was the very thing that troubled him."

Others have try'd to divert and entertain the troubles of other men by pretty and plausible sayings, such as this, "that if evils are long they are but light, if "sharp but short," and a hundred such like. Now I am apt to imagine that it is but very small comfort that a plain and ordinary man, lying under a sharp

fit of the stone, for a week together, receives from this fine sentence. For what pleasure soever men that are at ease and leisure may take in being the authors of witty sayings, I doubt it is but poor consolation, that a man under great and stinging afflictions finds from them. SERM. V.

The best moral argument to patience, in my opinion, is the advantage of patience it self. To bear evils as quietly as we can is the way to make them lighter and easier. But to toss and fling and to be restless is good for nothing but to fret and enrage our pain, to gall our sores and to make the burthen that is upon us sit more uneasy. But this is properly no consideration of comfort, but an art of managing our selves under afflictions so as not to make them more grievous than indeed they are.

But now the arguments which Christianity propounds to us are such as are a just and reasonable encouragement to men to bear sufferings patiently. Our religion sets before us not the example of a stupid Stoick, who had by obstinate principles hardened himself against all sense of pain beyond the common measures of humanity, but an example that lies level to all mankind, of a man like our selves, that had a tender sense of the least suffering, and yet patiently endured the greatest; of "JESUS the author and finisher of Heb. i. 22. "our faith, who for the joy that was set before him "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set "down at the right hand of the throne of GOD." GOD thought it expedient that the first Christians should by great hardships and persecutions be trained up for glory, and to animate and encourage them hereto the "captain of our salvation was crown'd by Heb. ii. 10. "suffer-

SERM. V.

"sufferings." Much more should the consideration of this pattern arm us with patience, against the common and ordinary calamities of this life, especially if we consider his example with this advantage, that though his sufferings were wholly undeserved, and not for himself but for us, yet he bore them patiently.

But the main consideration of all is, the glory which shall follow our sufferings as the reward of them, if they be for GOD and his cause; and if upon any other innocent account, as a reward of our patience. "Our "light affliction, which is but for a moment, work- "eth for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight "of glory." Christian religion hath secured us that we shall be infinite gainers by our sufferings. And who would not be content to suffer upon terms of such advantage? to "pass through many tribulations "into the kingdom of GOD," and to endure a short affliction for an endless happiness? The assurance of a future blessedness is a cordial that will revive our spirits more in the day of adversity, than all the wise sayings and considerations of philosophy.

2 Cor. iv. 17.

These are the arguments which Christianity propounds to us, and they are firm and sound at the bottom; they have strength and substance in them, and are apt to work upon human nature, and the most ordinary understanding is capable of the force of them. In the strength and virtue of this great example, and in contemplation of this glorious reward, with what resolution and chearfulness, with what courage and patience, did vast numbers of all sorts of people in the first ages of Christianity, not only men but women, not only those of greater spirit and more generous education, but those of the poorest and low-

est

eſt condition, not only the learned and the wiſe, but the ignorant and illiterate, encounter all the rage and malice of the world, and embrace torments and death? Had the precepts and counſels of philoſophy ever any ſuch effect upon the minds of men? I will conclude this with a paſſage in the life of Lipſius, who was a great ſtudier and admirer of the Stoical philoſophy. When he lay upon his death-bed, and one of his friends who came to viſit him told him, that he needed not uſe arguments to perſuade him to patience under his pains, the philoſophy which he had ſtudied ſo much would furniſh him with motives enough to that purpoſe, he anſwers him with this ejaculation, *Domine Jeſu, da mihi patientiam Chriſtianam*, "LORD JESUS, "give me Chriſtian patience." No patience like to that which the conſiderations of Chriſtianity are apt to work in us.

And now I have as briefly and plainly as I could endeavoured to repreſent to you the excellency of the Chriſtian religion, both in reſpect of the clear diſcoveries which it makes to us of the nature of GOD, which is the great foundation of all religion, and likewiſe in reſpect of the perfection of it's laws, and the power of it's arguments to perſuade men both to obey and ſuffer the will of GOD. By which you may ſee, what the proper tendency and deſign of this religion is, and what the laws and precepts of it would make men if they would truly obſerve them and live according to them, ſubſtantially religious towards GOD, chaſte and temperate, patient and contented in reference to themſelves and the diſpenſations of GOD's providence towards them, juſt and honeſt, kind and peaceable and good natured towards all men. In a

SERM. V.

word, the gospel describes God to us in all respects such a one as we would wish him to be, gives us such laws as every man that understands himself would chuse to live by, propounds such arguments to persuade to the obedience of these laws as no man that wisely loves himself and hath any tenderness for his own interest and happiness, either in this world or the other, can refuse to be mov'd withal.

And now methinks I may with some confidence challenge any religion in the world to shew such a complete body and collection of holy and reasonable laws establish'd upon such promises and threatnings as the gospel contains. And if any man can produce a religion that can reasonably pretend to an equal or a greater confirmation than the gospel hath, a religion the precepts and promises and threatnings whereof are calculated to make men wiser and better, more temperate and more chaste, more meek and more patient, more kind and more just, than the laws and motives of Christianity are apt to make men; if any man can produce such a religion, I am ready to be of it. Let but any man shew me any book in the world, the doctrines whereof have the seal of such miracles as the doctrine of the scriptures hath; a book which contains the heads of our duty so perfectly, and without the mixture of any thing that is unreasonable, or vicious, or any ways unworthy of God; that commands us every thing in reason necessary to to be done, and abridgeth us of no lawful pleasure without offering us abundant recompence for our present self-denial; a book the rules whereof, if they were practised, would make men more pious and devout, more holy and sober, more just and fair in their

their dealings, better friends and better neighbours, SERM. V.
better magistrates and better subjects, and better in all relations, and which does offer to the understanding of men more powerful arguments to persuade them to be all this; let any man, I say, shew me such a book, and I will lay aside the scripture and preach out of that.

And do we not all profess to be of this excellent religion, and to study and believe this holy book of the scriptures? But alas! who will believe that we do so, that shall look upon the actions and consider the lives of the greatest part of Christians? How grosly and openly do many of us contradict the plain precepts of the gospel, by our ungodliness and worldly lusts; by living intemperately or unjustly, or prophanely in this present world? As if "the grace of GOD which brings salvation," had never appear'd to us, as if we had never heard of heaven or hell, or believ'd not one word that the scripture says concerning them, as if we were in no expectation "of the blest" sed hope and the glorious appearance of the great "GOD and our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, whom "GOD hath appointed to judge the world in righte" ousness," and who will bestow mighty rewards upon those who faithfully serve him, but will come "in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that "know not GOD and that obey not the gospel of our "LORD JESUS CHRIST."

Let us not then deceive ourselves by pretending to this "excellent knowledge of CHRIST JESUS our "LORD," if we do not frame our lives according to it. For though we know those things never so well, yet we are not happy unless we do them: nay, we

are

SERM. V.

are but the more miserable for knowing them if we do them not; therefore it concerns every one of us to consider seriously what we believe; and whether our belief of the Christian religion have it's due effect upon our lives. If not, all the precepts and promises and threatnings of the gospel will rise up in judgment against us, and the articles of our faith will be so many articles of accusation, and the great weight of our charge will be this, that we did not obey that gospel which we profess'd to believe, that we made confession of the Christian faith, but liv'd like heathens. Not to believe the Christian religion, after so great evidence and confirmation as God hath given to it, is very unreasonable; but to believe it to be true, and yet to live as if it were false, is the greatest repugnancy and contradiction that can be. He that does not believe Christianity, either hath, or thinks he hath some reason for withholding his assent from it. But he that believes it, and yet lives contrary to it, knows that he hath no reason for what he does, and is convinced that he ought to do otherwise: And he is a miserable man indeed that does those things, for the doing of which he continually stands condemn'd by his own mind, and accordingly God will deal more severely with such persons. He will pardon a thousand defects in our understandings, if they do not proceed from gross carelessness and neglect of our selves; but the faults of our wills have no excuse, because we knew to do better and were convinced in our minds that we ought not to have done so.

Dost thou believe that "the wrath of God is re-
"veal'd from heaven against all ungodliness and un-
"righteousness of men," and dost thou still allow thy

self "in ungodliness and worldly lusts?" Art thou convinced that "without holiness no man shall see "the LORD," and dost thou still persist in a wicked course? Art thou fully persuaded that "no whore-"monger, nor adulterer, nor covetous, nor un-"righteous person shall have any inheritance in the "kingdom of GOD and CHRIST," and dost thou for all that continue to practise these vices? What canst thou say (man) why it should not be to thee according to thy faith? If it so fall out that thou art miserable and undone for ever, thou hast no reason to be surprised as if some unexpected thing had happen'd to these It is but with thee just as thou believedst it would be when thou didst these things. For how couldst thou expect that GOD should accept of thy good belief, when thou didst so notoriously contradict it by a bad life? How couldst thou look for other but that GOD should condemn thee for the doing of those things, for which thine own conscience did condemn thee all the while thou wast doing of them; when we come into the other world there is no consideration that will sting our consciences more cruelly than this, that we did wickedly when we knew to have done better, and chose to make our selves miserable when we understood the way to have been happy. To conclude, we Christians have certainly the best and the holiest, the wisest and most reasonable religion in the world; but then we are in the worst condition of all mankind, if the best religion in the world do not make us good.

SER-

SERMON VI.

The precepts of Chriſtianity not grievous.

1 JOHN v. 3.

—— *And his commandments are not grievous.*

SERM. VI.

ONE of the great prejudices which men have entertained againſt the Chriſtian religion is this, that it lays upon men "heavy burdens "and grievous to be born," that the laws of it are very ſtrict and ſevere, difficult to be kept, and yet dangerous to be broken; that it requires us to govern and keep under our paſſions, and to contradict many times our ſtrongeſt inclinations and deſires, "to cut off "our right hand and to pluck out our right eye, to "love our enemies, to bleſs them that curſe us, to "do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them "that deſpitefully uſe us and perſecute us;" to forgive the greateſt injuries that are done to us, and to make reparation for the leaſt that we do to others; to be contented with our condition, patient under ſufferings, and ready to ſacrifice our deareſt intereſts in this world, and even our very lives, in the cauſe of GOD and religion: all theſe ſeem to be hard ſayings and grievous commandments.

For the removal of this prejudice I have choſen theſe words of the apoſtle, which expreſly tell us the contrary, that "the commandments of GOD are not "grievous.

And

And though this be a great truth if it be impartially considered, yet it is also a great paradox to men of corrupt minds and vicious practices, who are prejudiced against religion and the holy laws of GOD by their interest and their lusts. This seems a strange proposition to those, who look upon religion at a distance and never try'd the experiment of a holy life, who measure the laws of GOD, not by the intrinsical goodness and equity of them, but by the reluctancy and opposition which they find in their own hearts against them.

Upon this account it will be requisite to take some pains to satisfy the reason of men concerning this truth, and, if it be possible, to make it so evident that those who are unwilling to own it may yet be ashamed to deny it. And methinks I have this peculiar advantage in the argument I have now undertaken, that every reasonable man cannot chuse but wish me success in this attempt, because I undertake the proof of that which it is every man's interest that it should be true: and if I can make it out, this pretence against religion will not only be baffled, but we shall gain a new and forcible argument to persuade men over to it.

Now the easiness or difficulty of the observation of any laws or commands depends chiefly upon these three things.

First, upon the nature of the laws themselves and their suitableness or unsuitableness to those to whom they are given.

Secondly, upon the ability or weakness of those on whom these laws are imposed for the keeping of them. For easiness and difficulty are relative terms and refer to some power, and a thing may be difficult

SERM. VI.

to a weak man which yet may be eaſy to the ſame perſon when aſſiſted with a greater ſtrength.

Thirdly, upon the encouragement that is given to the obſervation of them. For the propoſal of great rewards does very much qualify and allay the difficulty of any undertaking.

Now if I can make theſe three things evident: 1. that the laws of GOD are reaſonable, that is, ſuitable to our nature and advantageous to our intereſt: 2. that we are not deſtitute of ſufficient power and ability for the performance of them: and, 3. that we have the greateſt encouragements to this purpoſe: then have we all imaginable reaſon to aſſent to the truth of this propoſition that "the commandments of "GOD are not grievous."

I. The laws of GOD are reaſonable, that is, ſuitable to our nature and advantageous to our intereſt. 'Tis true GOD hath a ſovereign right over us as we are his creatures, and by virtue of this right he might without injuſtice have impos'd difficult taſks upon us, and have required hard things at our hands. But in making laws for us he hath not made uſe of this right. He hath commanded us nothing in the goſpel that is either unſuitable to our reaſon, or prejudicial to our intereſt; nay, nothing that is ſevere and againſt the grain of our nature, but when either the apparent neceſſity of our intereſt does require it, or an extraordinary reward is promiſed to our obedience. "He "hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good, and what "doth the LORD thy GOD require of thee, but to do "juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly "with thy GOD?" This is the ſum of the natural law, that we ſhould behave our ſelves reverently and

 obedient-

obediently towards the divine majeſty, and juſtly and charitably towards men; and that in order to the fitting of us for the better diſcharge of theſe duties, we ſhould govern our ſelves in the uſe of ſenſual delights with temperance and moderation. And if we go over the laws of Chriſtianity, we ſhall find that, excepting a very few particulars, they enjoin the very ſame things; only they have made our duty more clear and certain. But this I have had occaſion to make out largely in the foregoing diſcourſe, and therefore I ſhall ſay the leſs to it now.

As to the ſeveral parts of GOD's worſhip and ſervice, prayer and thankſgiving, hearing and reading the word of GOD, and receiving of the ſacrament; theſe are all no leſs for our own comfort and advantage than for the honour of GOD and religion. And there is nothing of difficulty or trouble in the external performance of them, but what hypocriſy can make tolerable to it ſelf: and certainly they muſt be not only much more eaſy, but even delightful, when they are directed by our underſtandings, and accompanied with our hearts and affections.

As for thoſe laws of religion which concern our duty to our ſelves, as temperance and chaſtity; or to others, as the ſeveral branches of juſtice and charity, comprehended in thoſe general rules, "of loving our "neighbour as our ſelves, and of doing to others "as we would have them to do to us:" there is nothing in all theſe laws but what is moſt reaſonable and fit to be done by us, nothing but what if we were to conſult our own intereſt and happineſs, and did rightly underſtand our ſelves, we would chuſe for our ſelves; nothing but what is eaſy to be underſtood,

and as eaſy to be practiſed by an honeſt and a willing mind.

Now the practice of all theſe is ſuitable to our nature and agreeable to the frame of our underſtandings; proper to our condition and circumſtances in this world, and preparatory to our happineſs in the next. And no man's reaſon did ever dictate to him the contrary of any of theſe; that it is fit for a creature not to love GOD, to be undutiful to his great ſovereign, and ungrateful to his beſt benefactor; that it is reaſonable for a man to debauch himſelf by intemperance and brutiſh ſenſuality; to hate, defraud and oppreſs other men. Our very natural reaſon, if we will but liſten to the dictates of it, is an enemy to all theſe ſins and a law againſt all theſe vices.

And as the practice of all piety and virtue is agreeable to our reaſon, ſo is it likewiſe for the intereſt of mankind; both of private perſons, and of publick ſocieties, as I have already ſhewn. Some virtues plainly tend to the preſervation of our health, others to the improvement and ſecurity of our eſtates, all to the peace and quiet of our minds; and which is ſomewhat more ſtrange, to the advancement of our eſteem and reputation; for though the world be generally bad, and men are apt to approve nothing ſo much as what they do themſelves; yet, I know not how it comes to paſs, men are commonly ſo juſt to virtue and goodneſs, as to praiſe it in others even when they do not practiſe it themſelves.

And as for thoſe precepts of Chriſtianity which ſeem to be moſt harſh and difficult at firſt appearance, (as repentance and reſtitution, mortification of our luſts and paſſions, humility, patience and contented-

neſs

neſs with our condition, and reſignation of our ſelves to the will of GOD; forgiving and loving our enemies, and ſelf-denial for the cauſe of GOD and religion) if we look well into them and conſider throughly the nature and tendency of them, even theſe will appear to be both reaſonable in themſelves, and upon one account or other really for our advantage.

What more reaſonable than repentance, than that a man when he hath done amiſs and contrary to his duty ſhould be heartily ſorry for it, and reſolve to do ſo no more? And how grievous ſoever it be, it is neceſſary, being the only way to pardon and peace. And in caſe our offence againſt GOD hath been complicated with injury to men, it is but reaſonable we ſhould make reſtitution as far as we are able, according to the nature of the injury. For without this our repentance is not real, becauſe we have not done what we can to undo our fault as much as we can, or at leaſt to hinder the injurious conſequences of it from proceeding any farther: nor can any man be judg'd to be truly ſorry for his ſin that retains the profit and advantages of it to himſelf. Beſides, that till reparation be made to the utmoſt of our power we can have no peace in our own conſciences, nor any well-grounded hopes of forgiveneſs from GOD.

Mortification of our luſts and paſſions, though, like repentance, it have ſomething in it that is troubleſom, yet nothing that is unreaſonable, or really to our prejudice. If we give way to our paſſions, we do but gratify our ſelves for the preſent in order to our future diſquiet; but if we reſiſt and conquer them, we lay the foundation of perpetual peace and tranquillity in our minds. If we govern our ſelves in the

uſe

SERM. VI.

use of sensual delights by the laws of God and reason, we shall find our selves more at ease than if we should let loose the reins to our appetites and lusts. For the more we gratify our lusts the more craving they will be, and the more impatient of denial. *Crescit indulgens sibi dirus hydrops*, every lust is a kind of hydropick distemper, and the more we drink the more we shall thirst. So that by retrenching our inordinate desires we do not rob our selves of any true pleasure, but only prevent the pain and trouble of farther dissatisfaction.

Humility, though it may seem to expose a man to some contempt, yet it is truly the readiest way to honour: as on the contrary, pride is a most improper and absurd means for the accomplishing of the end it aims at. All other vices do in some measure attain their end; covetousness does usually raise an estate, and ambitious endeavours do often advance men to high places; but pride and insolence and contempt of others do infallibly defeat their own design. They aim at respect and esteem but never attain it, for all mankind do naturally hate and slight a proud man.

What more reasonable than patience and contentedness, and that we should in all things resign up our selves to the will of God, who loves us as well as we do our selves, and knows what is good for us better than we do our selves? this certainly is the best way to prevent anxiety and perplexity of mind, and to make the worst condition as tolerable as it can be, and much more easy than it would be otherwise.

As for that peculiar law of Christianity which forbids revenge, and commands us to forgive injuries and to love our enemies, no man can think it grievous

vous who considers the pleasure and sweetness of love and the glorious victory of overcoming evil with good, and then compares these with the restless torment and perpetual tumults of a malicious and revengeful spirit. SERM. VI.

And lastly, self-denial for the cause of God and religion; this is neither unreasonable nor to our disadvantage. If we consider our infinite obligations to God, we have no reason to think much to sacrifice to him our dearest interests in this world; especially if we consider withal, how disproportionably great the reward of our sufferings shall be in another world. Besides that the interest of religion is of so great concernment to the happiness of mankind, that every man is bound for that reason to assert the truth of it with the hazard of any thing that is most valuable to him in this world.

II. We are not destitute of sufficient power and strength for the performing of God's commands. Had God given us laws but no power to keep them, his commandments would then indeed have been grievous. 'Tis true we have contracted a great deal of weakness and impotency by our wilful degeneracy from goodness, but that grace which the gospel offers to us for our assistance is sufficient for us. And this seems to be the particular reason why the apostle says here in the text, that his "commandments are "not grievous," because he offers us an assistance proportionable to the difficulty of his commands, and the necessity of our condition: for it follows immediately after the text, "for whosoever is born of God, "overcometh the world." Therefore the "com-"mandments of God are not grievous," because every child

SERM. VI.

child of God, that is, every Christian is endued with a power whereby he is enabled to resist and conquer the temptations of the world. The same apostle elsewhere encourages Christians upon the same consideration, "greater is he that is in you, than he that is "in the world." Though we be encompassed with many and potent enemies who make it their business to tempt and to deter us from our duty, yet our case is not hard so long as we have a greater strength on our side: and this the apostle tells us is the case of every Christian, "greater is he that is in you, than "he that is in the world." Are there legions of devils who are continually designing and working our ruin? there are also myriads of good angels who are more chearful and officious to do us good. For I doubt not, but as those who are bent to do wickedly will never want tempters to urge them on and to push them forward in an evil course; so on the other hand, those who apply themselves seriously to the business of religion, and yield themselves tractable to good motions, will find the good spirit of God more ready and active to encourage them than the devil can be to pull them back; unless we think that God hath given a greater power and a larger commission to the devil to do men mischief, than to his holy spirit and his holy angels for our assistance and encouragement. But then we are to understand that this assistance is only offered to men, and not forced upon them whether they will or no. For if we beg God's grace but neglect to make use of it, if we implore his assistance for the mortifying of our lusts but will not contribute our own endeavours, God will withdraw his grace and take away his holy spirit from

1 Joh. iv. 4.

us

us. Nay, if after we have begun well we do notoriously slacken our endeavours, we forfeit the divine assistance: if when by GOD's grace we have in a good measure conquer'd the first difficulties of religion, and gain'd some habitual strength against sin; if after this we grow careless and remiss, and neglect our guard, and lay our selves open to temptations, GOD's spirit will not always strive with us: notwithstanding all the promises of the gospel and the mighty assistances there offered to us, if we love any lust, and will with Sampson lay our head in Dalilah's lap, we shall be insensibly rob'd "of our strength and become "like other men."

III. We have the greatest encouragement to the observance of GOD's commands. Two things make any course of life easy; present pleasure; and the assurance of a future reward. Religion gives part of it's reward in hand, the present comfort and satisfaction of having done our duty; and for the rest, it offers us the best security that heaven can give. Now these two must needs make our duty very easy; a considerable reward in hand, and not only the hopes but the assurance of a far greater recompence hereafter.

1. Present peace and satisfaction of mind, and unexpressible joy and pleasure flowing from the testimony of a good conscience. This is present payment, besides that it is the earnest of a future and greater happiness. And this does naturally spring up in the mind of a good man; "great peace have they that "love thy law, and nothing shall offend them." All acts of piety and virtue are not only delightful for the present, but they leave peace and content-

3.

ment behind them: a peace that no outward violence can interrupt or take from us. The pleaſures of a holy life have moreover this peculiar advantage of worldly joys, that we ſhall never be weary of them; we cannot be cloy'd by the frequent repetition of theſe pleaſures, nor by the long enjoyment of them. I know that ſome vices pretend to bring great pleaſure along with them, and that the delights of a ſenſual and voluptuous life make a glorious ſhow and are attended with much pomp and noiſe, like the ſports of children and fools which are loud and clamorous; or, as Solomon elegantly compares them, "like the "crackling of thorns under a pot," which makes a little noiſe and a ſudden blaze that is preſently over. But the ſerious and the manly pleaſures, the ſolid and ſubſtantial joys, are only to be found in the ways of religion and virtue. The moſt ſenſual man that ever was in the world never felt his heart touch'd with ſo delicious and laſting a pleaſure as that is which ſprings from a clear conſcience, and a mind fully ſatisfied with it's own actions.

2. But the great encouragement of all is the aſſurance of a future reward. The firm perſuaſion whereof is enough to raiſe us above any thing in this world, and to animate us with courage and reſolution againſt the greateſt difficulties. So the apoſtle reaſons; "his commandments are not grievous; "for whatſoever is born of GOD overcometh the "world, and this is the victory that overcometh the "world even our faith." The belief of a future happineſs and glory was that which made the primitive Chriſtians ſo victorious over the world, and gave them the courage to reſiſt all the pleaſures and terrors

of

of sense. It cannot be deny'd, but that a religious course of life is liable to be incumbred with many difficulties which are naturally grievous to flesh and blood. But a Christian is able to comfort himself under all these with the thoughts of his end, which is everlasting life. He considers the goodness of God, which he believes would not deny him the free enjoyment of the things of this world, were it not that he hath such joys and pleasures in store for him as will abundantly recompense his present self-denial and sufferings.

Let us now put both these together, the pleasures of religion and the rewards of it, and they cannot but appear to be a mighty encouragement. With what pleasure does a man that lives a holy and a virtuous life despise the pleasures of sin, and notwithstanding all the allurements of sense persist resolutely in his course? And how is such a man confirm'd in his purpose and animated in his holy resolution, when he finds that God and his own conscience do applaud his choice; when all along in the course of religion and a virtuous life, in his conflicts with sin and resistance of temptations, he hath for his present reward the two great pleasures of innocence and of victory, and for his future encouragement the joyful hopes of a crown and a kingdom? A recompence so great, as is sufficient to make a lame man walk, enough to make any one willing to offer violence to his strongest passions and inclinations. A man would be content to strive with himself and to conflict with great difficulties, in hopes of a mighty reward. What poor man would not chearfully carry a great burthen of gold and silver, that were assured to have the great-

SERM. VI.

eſt ſhare of it for his pains, and thereby to be made a man for ever? Whatever difficulties religion is attended withal, they are all ſweetned and made eaſy by the propoſal of a great and eternal reward.

But are there no difficulties then in religion? Is every thing then ſo plain and eaſy? Are all the ways of virtue ſo ſmooth and even as we have here repreſented them? Hath not our SAVIOUR told us, that

Mat. vii. 14. "ſtrait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads "to life, and few there be that find it?" Does not

Act. xiv. 22. the apoſtle ſay, "that through much tribulation we

2 Tim. iii. 12. "muſt enter into the kingdom of GOD?" And, "that "all that will live godly in CHRIST JESUS ſhall ſuffer "perſecution?" And does not the ſcripture every where ſpeak of ſtriving, and wreſtling, and running, and fighting; of labouring, and watching, and giving all diligence? And is there nothing grievous in all this?

This is a very material objection, and therefore I ſhall be the more careful to give a ſatisfactory anſwer to it. And that I may do it the more diſtinctly be pleas'd to conſider theſe ſix things. 1. That the ſuffering of perſecution for religion is an exttaordinary caſe, which did chiefly concern the firſt ages of Chriſtianity. 2. That this diſcourſe concerning the eaſineſs of GOD's commands does all along ſuppoſe and acknowledge the difficulties of the entrance upon a religious courſe. 3. Nor is there any reaſon it ſhould exclude our after care and diligence. 4. All the difficulties of religion are very much mitigated and allayed by hope and by love. 5. There is incomparably more difficulty and trouble in the ways of ſin and vice, than in the ways of religion and vir-

tue. 6. If we do but put virtue and vice, a religious and a wicked course of life in equal circumstances; if we will but suppose a man as much accustom'd and inur'd to the one as he has been to the other, then I shall not doubt to pronounce that the advantages of ease and pleasure will be found to be on the side of religion. SERM. VI.

I. The suffering of persecution for religion is an extraordinary case, and did chiefly concern the first ages of Christianity. And therefore the general sayings of our SAVIOUR and his apostles concerning the persecuted state of Christians are to be limited, as doubtless they were intended, principally to those first times, and by no means to be equally extended to all ages of the church. At first indeed, whoever embraced the profession of Christianity did thereby expose themselves to all the sufferings which the power and malice of the world could afflict them withal: But since "the kingdoms of the earth became the "kingdoms of the LORD and of his CHRIST," and the governors of the world began to be patrons of the church, 'tis so far from being universally true, that every Christian hath suffer'd the violence of persecution, that it hath been a rare case and happen'd only in some few ages, and to some persons. So that this is accidental to a state of religion, and therefore ought not to be reckoned among the ordinary difficulties of it. And when it happens GOD gives extraordinary supports, and promises, mighty rewards to make it tolerable.

II. This discourse concerning the easiness of GOD's commands does all along suppose and acknowledge the difficulties of the first entrance upon a religious course,

SERM. VI.

courſe, except only in thoſe perſons who have had the happineſs to be trained up to religion by the eaſy and inſenſible degrees of a pious and virtuous education. Theſe indeed are freed from a great deal of pains and difficulty, which others who are reclaimed from a bad courſe of life muſt expect to undergo. They are in a great meaſure excuſed from the pangs of the new birth, from the pains of a ſudden and violent change, from the terrors of an affrighted mind, and from the deep and piercing ſorrows of a more ſolemn repentance. Whereas thoſe who have lived wickedly before, muſt look to meet with a great deal more trouble, becauſe they are put upon changing the whole courſe of their life at once, and muſt contend with inveterate habits, and offer no ſmall violence to themſelves in plucking up thoſe vices which have been rooted in them by long cuſtom and continuance. This indeed is grievous, and muſt needs be ſenſibly painful, like the "plucking out of a "right eye, or the "cutting off a right hand:" for in this caſe a man muſt ſtrive againſt the very bent and inclination of his ſtrongeſt appetites, againſt the tyranny of cuſtom and the mighty power of a ſecond nature. But this is no juſt reflection upon religion, becauſe this does not proceed from the nature of GOD's laws, but from an accidental indiſpoſition in our ſelves, which religion is apt to remove: and if we will but allow ſome time of trouble and uneaſineſs for the cure, when that is once wrought the commands of GOD will be more eaſy and delightful to us than ever our ſins and luſts were.

III. Nor does this exclude our after care and diligence. For when the apoſtle ſays that "the commandments "of

" of God are not grievous," he does by no means intend to insinuate that they are calculated for slothful and lazy persons, that they are so easy as to require no industry and endeavour on our part; he only aims to prevent a tacit objection which lies at the bottom of many men's hearts, as if religion were a most grievous and intolerable burthen, and there were more trouble and less pleasure in it than in any other action of human life. This he utterly denies, but does not hereby intend to exclude such diligence and industry as men use about other matters. And if I should tell you, that the business of religion does not require a very vigorous prosecution and great earnestness of endeavour, I should speak quite besides the holy scriptures, which so frequently command seeking and striving and labouring, besides many other such phrases that import diligence and earnestness. And indeed it were unfit that so excellent and glorious a reward as the gospel promises should stoop down like fruit upon a full-laden bough to be plucked by every idle and wanton hand; that heaven should be prostituted to the lazy desires and faint wishes, to the cheap and ordinary endeavours of slothful men. God will not so much disparage eternal life and happiness, as to bestow it upon those who have conceived so low an opinion of it as not to think it worth the labouring for. And surely this is sufficient to recommend religion to any considerate man, if the advantages of it be much greater than of any worldly design that we can propound to our selves, and the difficulties of it not greater. If the same seriousness and industry of endeavour, which men commonly use to raise a fortune, and advance themselves in the world, will

serve

SERM. VI.

ſerve to make a man a good man, and to bring him to heaven, what reaſon hath any man to complain of the hard terms of religion? and I think I may truly ſay, that uſually leſs than this does it. For God conſiders our condition in this world, and the preſſing neceſſities of this life, that we are fleſh as well as ſpirit, and that we have great need of theſe things, and therefore he allows us to be very ſedulous and induſtrious about them. However this I am ſure of, that if men would be as ſerious to ſave their immortal ſouls, as they are to ſupport theſe dying bodies; if they would but provide for eternity with the ſame ſolicitude and real care as they do for this life; if they would but ſeek heaven with the ſame ardour of affection and vigour of proſecution as they ſeek earthly things; if they would but love God as much as many men do the world, and mind godlineſs as much as men uſually do gain; if they would but go to church with as good a will as men ordinarily do to their markets and fairs, and be in as good earneſt at their devotions as men commonly are in driving a bargain; if they would but endure ſome troubles and inconveniencies in the ways of religion with the ſame patience and conſtancy as they can do ſtorms, and foul ways, and miſchances, when they are travelling about their worldly occaſions; if they would but avoid bad company as men uſe to do cheaters, and reject the temptations of the devil and the world, as they would do the kind words and inſinuations of a man whom they verily believe to have a deſign to overreach them; I am confident that ſuch a one could not fail of heaven, and would be much ſurer of it upon theſe terms, than any man that doth all the

other

other things could be of getting an estate or of attaining any thing in this world. SERM. VI.

And cannot every man do thus much? All that I have said signifies no more but that men should use their sincere endeavours, and this surely every man can do. For to use our sincere endeavours is nothing else but to do as much as we can, and it is non-sense for any man to deny that he can do as much as he can. And if we would do thus much we are sure of God's grace and assistance, which is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men. But men expect that religion should cost them no pains, that happiness should drop into their laps without any design and endeavour on their part, and that after they have done what they please while they live, God should snatch them up to heaven when they die. But though "the commandments of God be not grievous," yet it is fit to let men know that they are not thus easy.

IV. All the difficulties of religion are very much allayed and sweetened by hope and love. By the hopes of a mighty reward; so great, as is enough to raise us above our selves, and to make us break through all difficulties and discouragements: and by the love of God, who hath taken all imaginable ways to endear himself to us. He gave us our beings, and when we were fallen from that happiness to which at first we were designed, he was pleased to restore us to a new capacity of it by sending his only son into the world to die for us. So that if we have any sense of kindness we cannot but love him who hath done so much to oblige us, and if we love him entirely nothing that he commands will be grievous to us; nay, so far from that, that the greatest pleasure we

SERM. VI.

are capable of will be to pleaſe him. For nothing is difficult to love. It will make a man deny himſelf, and croſs his own inclinations to pleaſure them whom he loves. It is a paſſion of a ſtrange power where it reigns, and will cauſe a man to ſubmit to thoſe things with delight, which in other circumſtances would ſeem grievous to him. "Jacob ſerved for "Rachel ſeven "years," and after that "ſeven years more; and they "ſeemed unto him but a few days, for the love he "had to her." Did but the love of GOD rule in our hearts, and had we as real an affection for him as ſome men have for their friends, there are no ſuch difficulties in religion but what love would conquer, and the ſevereſt parts of it would become eaſy when they were once undertaken by a willing mind.

V. There is incomparably more trouble in the ways of ſin and vice than in thoſe of religion and virtue. Every notorious ſin is naturally attended with ſome inconvenience of harm, or danger, or diſgrace; which the ſinner ſeldom conſiders till the ſin be committed, and then he is in a labyrinth, and in ſeeking the way out of a preſent inconvenience he intangles himſelf in more. He is glad to make uſe of indirect arts, and laborious crafts, to avoid the conſquence of his faults; and many times is fain to cover one ſin with another, and the more he ſtrives to diſentangle himſelf the more is he "ſnared in the work of his own "hands." Into what perplexities did David's ſin bring him? ſuch as by all his power and arts he could not free himſelf from: he was glad to commit a greater crime to avoid the ſhame of a leſs, and could find no other way to conceal his adultery but by plunging himſelf into the guilt of murther. And thus it

is

is proportionably in all other vices. The ways of sin are crooked paths, full of windings and turnings; but the way of holiness and virtue is a high way, and lies so plain before us that "way-faring men, though "fools, shall not err therein." There needs no skill to keep a man's self true and honest, if we will but resolve to deal justly, and to "speak the truth to our "neighbour," nothing in the whole world is easier: for there is nothing of artifice and reach required to enable a man to speak as he thinks, and to do to others as as he would be dealt withal himself.

And as the ways of sin are full of intricacy and perplexities, so likewise of trouble and disquiet. There is no man that wilfully commits any sin, but his conscience smites him for it, and his guilty mind is frequently galled with the remembrance of it; but the reflection upon honest and virtuous actions hath nothing of regret and disquiet in it. No man's conscience ever troubled him for not being dishonest, no man's reason ever challenged him for not being drunk, no man ever broke his sleep or was haunted with fears of divine vengeance because he was conscious to himself that he had "lived soberly, and "righteously, and godly in the world." But with the ungodly it is not so. There is no man that is knowingly wicked but he is guilty to himself, and there is no man that carries guilt about him but he hath received a sting into his soul which makes him restless, so that he can never have any perfect ease and pleasure in his mind.

I might have descended to particular instances, and have shewn how much more troublesom the practice of every sin and vice is than the exercise of the con-

SERM. VI.

trary grace and virtue; but that would be too large a ſubject to be brought within the limits of a ſingle diſcourſe.

VI. Let but virtue and vice, a religious and wicked courſe of life be put in equal circumſtances, do but ſuppoſe a man to be as much accuſtomed and inured to the one as he has been to the other, and then I doubt not but the advantages of eaſe and pleaſure, will be found to be on the ſide of religion: and if we do not put the caſe thus, we make an unequal compariſon. For there is no man but when he firſt begins a wicked courſe feels a great deal of regret in his mind, the terrors of his conſcience and the fears of damnation are very troubleſom to him. It is poſſible that by degrees a man may harden his conſcience, and by a long cuſtom of ſinning may in a great meaſure wear off that tender ſenſe of good and evil which makes ſin ſo uneaſy: but then if in the practice of a holy life a man may by the ſame degrees arrive to far greater peace and tranquillity of mind than ever any wicked man found in a ſinful courſe, if by cuſtom virtue will come to be more pleaſant than ever vice was, then the advantage is plainly on the ſide of religion. And this is truly the caſe. It is troubleſom at firſt for a man to begin any new courſe, and to do contrary to what he hath been accuſtom'd to; but let a man but habituate himſelf to a religious and virtuous life, and the trouble will go off by degrees, and unſpeakable pleaſure ſucceed in the room of it. It is an excellent rule which Pythagoras gave to his ſcholars, *optimum vitæ genus eligito, nam conſuetudo faciet jucundiſſimum*; "pitch upon the beſt "courſe of life," reſolve always to do that which is

moſt

moſt reaſonable and virtuous, "and cuſtom will ſoon "render it the moſt eaſy." There is nothing of difficulty in a good life, but what may be conquered by cuſtom as well as the difficulties of any other courſe, and when a man is once uſed to it the pleaſure of it will be greater than of any other courſe. SERM. VI.

Let no man then decline or forſake religion for the pretended difficulties of it, and lay aſide all care of GOD's commandments upon this ſuggeſtion, that they are impoſſible to be kept. For you ſee they are not only poſſible but eaſy. And thoſe who upon pretence of the trouble and difficulties of religion abandon themſelves to a wicked courſe of life, may eaſily be convinced that they take more pains to make themſelves miſerable than would ſerve to bring them to happineſs. There is no man that is a ſervant to ſin, and a ſlave to any baſe luſt, but might, if he pleaſed, get to heaven with leſs trouble than he goes to hell.

So that upon conſideration of the whole matter, there is no reaſon why any man ſhould be deterred from a holy and virtuous life for fear of the labour and pains of it. Becauſe every one that is wicked takes more pains in another way, and is more induſtrious only to a worſe purpoſe. Now he that can travel in deep and foul ways ought not to ſay that he cannot walk in fair. He that ventures to run upon a precipice, when every ſtep he takes is with danger of his life and his ſoul, ought not to pretend any thing againſt the plain and ſafe paths of religion, which will entertain us with pleaſure all along in the way, and crown us with happineſs at the end.

SER-

SERMON VII.

Of the obligation of Christians to a holy life.

---

2 TIM. ii. 19.

Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.

SERM. VII.

THE whole verse runs thus: "nevertheless "the foundation of GOD standeth sure, "having this seal, the LORD knoweth "them that are his: and, let every one that nameth "the name of CHRIST depart from iniquity.

In which words the apostle declares to us the terms of the covenant between GOD and man. For the word θεμέλιος, which is translated foundation, according to the usual signification of it, is likewise (as learned men have observ'd) sometimes used for an instrument of contract whereby two parties do oblige themselves mutually to each other. And this notion of the word agrees very well with what follows concerning the seal affix'd to it, which is very suitable to a covenant, but not at all to a foundation. 'Tis true indeed, as the learned Grotius hath observed, there used anciently to be inscriptions on foundation-stones, and the word σφραγὶς, which we render seal, may likewise signify an inscription; and then the sense will be very current thus, the foundation of GOD standeth sure, having this inscription. But it is to

be considered, that though σφραγὶς may signify an inscription, yet it is only an inscription upon a seal which hath no relation to a foundation, but is very proper to a covenant or mutual obligation. And accordingly the seal affix'd to this instrument, or covenant between GOD and man, is in allusion to the custom of those countries said to have an inscription on both sides agreeable to the condition of the persons contracting. On GOD's part there is this impress or inscription, "the LORD knoweth them that are his," that is, GOD will own and reward those that are faithful to him: and on our part, "let every one that "nameth the name of CHRIST, depart from ini- "quity." SERM. VII.

"Let every one that nameth the name of CHRIST," that is, that calls himself a Christian. For to name the name of any one, or to have his name call'd upon by us does, according to the use of this phrase among the Hebrews, signify nothing else but to be denominated from him. Thus 'tis frequently used in the old testament, and sometimes in the new, "do they not "blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are "called?" that is, the name or title of Christians; and that expression, "if ye be reproached for the "name of CHRIST," is at the sixteenth verse varied, "if any man suffer as a Christian." So that to name the name of CHRIST is to call ourselves Christians. Jam. ii 7. 1 Pet. iv. 14.

"Let every one that nameth the name of CHRIST "depart from iniquity." The word ἀδικία is often taken strictly for injustice or unrighteousness, but sometimes used more largely for sin and wickedness in the general. And so it seems to be used here in the

the text, because there is no reason from the context to restrain it to any particular kind of sin or vice, and because Christianity lays an equal obligation upon men to abstain from all sin. "Let every one that "nameth the name of CHRIST depart from iniqui- "ty," that is, every Christian obligeth himself by his profession to renounce all sin and to live a holy life.

In speaking to this argument I shall do these two things.

1. Shew what obligation the profession of Christianity lays upon men to live holy lives.

2. Endeavour to perswade those who call themselves Christians to answer this obligation.

I. What obligation the profession of Christianity lays upon men to live holy lives. He that calls himself a Christian professeth to entertain the doctrine of CHRIST, to live in the imitation of his holy example, and to have solemnly engaged himself to all this. I shall speak briefly to these, and then come to that which I principally intend, to perswade men to live accordingly.

1. He that professeth himself a Christian professeth to entertain the doctrine of CHRIST, to believe the whole gospel, to assent to all the articles of the Christian faith, to all the precepts and promises and threatnings of the gospel. Now the great design, the proper intention of this doctrine is to take men off from sin, and to direct and encourage them to a holy life. It teacheth us what we are to believe concerning GOD and CHRIST, not with any design to entertain our minds with the bare speculation of those truths, but to better our lives. For every article of

our

our faith is a proper argument againſt ſin, and a pow- SERM. VII.
erful motive to obedience. The whole hiſtory of CHRIST's appearance in the world, all the diſcourſes and actions of his life, and the ſufferings of his death do all tend to this; the ultimate iſſue of all is the deſtroying of ſin; ſo St. John tells us, " for this 1 Joh. iii. 8.
" purpoſe was the ſon of GOD manifeſted that he
" might deſtroy the works of the devil." But this is moſt expreſly and fully declar'd to us, Tit. ii. 11, 12, 13, 14. " The grace of GOD that bringeth ſal-
" vation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that
" denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts we ſhould
" live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly, in this pre-
" ſent world; looking for that bleſſed hope, and the
" glorious appearing of the great GOD and our SA-
" VIOUR JESUS CHRIST; who gave himſelf for us
" that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and
" purify unto himſelf a peculiar people zealous of
" good works."

The precepts of the goſpel do ſtrictly command holineſs, and that univerſal; the purity of our ſouls, and the chaſtity of our bodies; " to cleanſe our ſelves 2 Cor. vii. 1.
" from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit? to abſtain 1 Theſ. v. 22.
" from all kind of evil; to be holy in all manner of
" converſation." They require us to endeavour after the higheſt degrees of holineſs that are attainable by us in this imperfect ſtate, " to be holy as he that 1 Pet. i. 15.
" hath called us is holy; to be perfect as our father
" which is in heaven is perfect." Mat. v. 48.

And all the promiſes of the goſpel are ſo many encouragements to obedience and a holy life; " having 2 Cor. vii. 1.
" therefore theſe promiſes, let us cleanſe ourſelves
" from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and perfect ho-

4.

SERM. VII.

" lineſs in the fear of GOD." We are told by St. Peter that theſe exceeding great and precious promiſes
2 Pet. i. 4. are given to us that by theſe " we might be partak-
" ers of a divine nature, having eſcaped the pollu-
" tion that is in the world through luſt; and that we might " give all diligence to add to our faith
" virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge
" temperance and patience and brotherly-kindneſs
" and charity."

And the threatnings of the goſpel are ſo many powerful arguments againſt ſin.

Rom. i. 16. 18. Therefore the apoſtle calls the goſpel " the power
" of GOD unto ſalvation," becauſe therein the "wrath
" of GOD is revealed from heaven againſt all ungod-
" lineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men." So that if we call our ſelves Chriſtians we profeſs to embrace the holy doctrine of the Chriſtian religion which is perfectly oppoſite to all impiety and wickedneſs of life. We profeſs to be governed by thoſe laws which do ſtrictly enjoin holineſs and virtue. We profeſs to be perſuaded that all the promiſes and threatnings of the goſpel are true, which offer ſuch great and glorious rewards to obedience, and threaten tranſgreſſion and diſobedience with ſuch dreadful puniſhments. And if ſo, we are obliged both by our reaſon and our intereſt to live accordingly.

2. He that profeſſeth himſelf a Chriſtian profeſſeth to live in the imitation of CHRIST's example and to follow his ſteps " who did no ſin, neither was
" guile found in his mouth." The ſon of GOD came into the world not only by his doctrine to inſtruct us in the way to happineſs, and by his death to make expiation of ſin, but by his life to be an example to us

of holineſs and virtue. Therefore in ſcripture we find ſeveral titles given him which import his exemplarineſs, as of a prince and a captain, a maſter and a guide. Now if he be our pattern we ſhould endeavour to be like him, " to have the ſame mind that " was in CHRIST JESUS; to walk in love as he " alſo hath loved us and given himſelf for us." We ſhould aſpire after the higheſt degree of holineſs, make it our conſtant and ſincere endeavour to pleaſe GOD and do his will and " to fulfil all righteouſneſs" as he did. Does any man profeſs himſelf a Chriſtian and yet abandons himſelf to intemperance and filthy luſts? is this like our SAVIOUR? Are we cruel and unmerciful? is this like the high prieſt of our profeſſion? Are we proud and paſſionate, malicious and revengeful? is this to be like-minded with CHRIST who was meek and lowly in ſpirit, who prayed for his enemies and offered up his blood to GOD on the behalf of them that ſhed it? If we call our ſelves Chriſtians we profeſs to have the life of CHRIST continually before us, and to be always correcting and reforming our lives by that pattern. SERM. VII.

3. He that calls himſelf a Chriſtian hath ſolemnly engaged himſelf to renounce all ſin and to live a holy life. By baptiſm we have ſolemnly taken upon us the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, and engaged our ſelves to renounce the devil and all his works, and obediently to keep GOD's commandments. Anciently thoſe who were baptized put off their garments, which ſignified the putting off the body of ſin; and were immerſed and buried in the water, to repreſent their death to ſin: and then did riſe up again out of the water, to ſignify their entrance upon a new life. And

SERM. VII.

to these customs the apostle alludes when he says, "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer
Rom. vi. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. "therein; know ye not, that so many of us as were "baptized into JESUS CHRIST were baptized into his "death? Therefore we are buried with him by bap- "tism into death, that like as CHRIST was raised up "from the dead by the glory of the father, even so "we also should walk in newness of life: for if we "have been planted together in the likeness of his "death we shall be also in the likeness of his resur- "rection, knowing this, that our old man is crucifi- "ed with him, that the body of sin might be destroy- "ed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. So that by baptism we profess to be entred into a new state, and to be endued with a new nature; "to have "put off the old man with his deeds;" to have quit- ted "our former conversation, which is corrupt accor- "ding to the deceitful lusts," and to be "renewed in "the spirit of our minds," and to have "put on the "new man which after GOD is created in righteous- "ness and true holiness." And therefore baptism is called the "putting on of CHRIST; as many of
Gal. iii. 27. "you as have been baptized into CHRIST, have put "on CHRIST." Now if we profess to have put on CHRIST we must quit and renounce our lusts, be- cause these are inconsistent, as appears by the oppo- sition which the apostle makes between them;
Rom. xiii. 14. "put ye on the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and make "not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts there- "of."

And as we did solemnly covenant with GOD to this purpose in baptism, so we do solemnly renew this obligation so often as we receive the blessed sacrament

of

of CHRIST's body and blood. Therefore the cup in the sacrament is called the "new covenant in his blood," that is, this represents the shedding of CHRIST's blood by which rite the covenant between GOD and man is ratified. And as by this GOD doth confirm his promises to us, so we do oblige our selves to be faithful and obedient to him, "and if we sin wilfully "after we have received the knowledge of the truth," that is, after we are become Christians, "we account "the blood of the covenant a common thing," that is, we make nothing of the solemnest rite that ever was used in the world for confirmation of any covenant, the shedding of the blood of the son of GOD. And that this was always understood to be the meaning of this holy sacrament to renew our covenant with GOD, and solemnly to confirm our resolutions of a holy life is very plain from that account which Pliny * gives us of the worship of the Christians in a letter to Trajan the Emperor; in which he tells him "that they assembled early in the morning before "day, to sing a hymn to CHRIST as GOD;" and then (saith he) they do *sacramento se obstringere*, "bind "themselves by a sacrament or oath not to rob or "steal or commit adultery, not to break their word "or falsify their trust, and after they have eaten to-"gether they depart home." Which is plainly an account of the Christians celebrating of the holy sacrament, which it seems was then looked upon as an oath, whereby Christians did solemnly covenant and engage themselves against all wickedness and vice. SERM. VII.

Thus you see what obligation the profession of Christianity lays upon us to holiness of life. From

* Plin. epist. l. 10. epist. 97.

all

all which it is evident that the gospel requires something on our part. For the covenant between God and us is a mutual engagement, and as there are blessings promised on his part so there are conditions to be performed on ours. And if we live wicked and unholy lives, if we neglect our duty towards God we have no title at all to the blessings of this covenant. The contrary doctrine to this hath been greedily entertained to the vast prejudice of Christianity, as if in this new covenant of the gospel God took all upon himself, and required nothing or as good as nothing, of us, that it would be a disparagement to the freedom of God's grace to think he expects any thing from us. That the gospel is all promises and our part is only to believe and embrace them, that is, to be confident that God will perform them if we can but think so, though we do nothing else; which is an easy condition to fools but the hardest in the world to a wise man, who if his salvation depended upon it could never persuade himself to believe, that the holy God without any respect at all to his repentance and amendment would bestow upon him forgiveness of sins and eternal life, only because he was confident that God would do so. As if any man could think that it were a thing so highly acceptable to God that men should believe of him that he loves to dispense his grace and mercy upon the most unfit and unreasonable terms. A covenant does necessarily imply a mutual obligation, and the scripture plainly tells us what are the terms and conditions of this covenant both on God's part and ours, namely, that he "will be our God" and we "shall be his people." But he hath no-where said that though we be not his people

people yet he will be our GOD. The seal of this covenant hath two inscriptions upon it; one on GOD's part, that he will know them that are his; and another on our part, that we shall depart from iniquity. But if we will not submit to this condition GOD will not know us, but will bid us depart from him. So our SAVIOUR tells us, "I will say unto them depart from me ye workers of iniquity, I know you not." If we deal falsly in covenant with GOD and break loose from all our engagements to him, we release GOD from all the promises that he hath made to us. If we neglect to perform those conditions upon which he hath suspended the performance of his promises, we discharge the obligation on GOD's part, and he remains faithful though he deny us that happiness which he promised under those conditions which we have neglected. SERM. VII. Mat. vii. 23.

II. I come now to the second thing propounded, and that is to persuade those who profess Christianity to answer those obligations to a holy life, which their religion lays upon them. We all call our selves Christians, and would be very much offended at any man that should deny us this title. But let us not cheat our selves with an empty and insignificant name, but if we will call our selves Christians let us fill up this great title, and make good our profession by a suitable life and practice. And to persuade us hereto, I will urge these three considerations.

1. The indecency of the contrary.
2. The great scandal of it to our blessed SAVIOUR and his holy religion, and
3. The infinite danger of it to our own souls.

1. Consider

1. Consider how unbecoming it is for a man to live unsuitably to his profession. If we call our selves Christians we profess to entertain the doctrine of the gospel, to be taught and instructed by the best master, to be the disciples of the highest and most perfect institution that ever was in the world, to have embraced a religion which contains the most exact rules for the conduct and government of our lives, which lays down the plainest precepts, sets before us the best patterns and examples of a holy life, and offers us the greatest assistances and encouragements to this purpose. We profess to be furnished with the best arguments to excite us to holiness and virtue, to be awed with the greatest fears and animated with the best hopes of any men in the world.

Now whoever makes such a profession as this obligeth himself to live answerably, to do nothing that shall grosly contradict it. Nothing is more absurd than for a man to act contrary to his profession, to pretend to great matters and perform nothing of what he pretends to. Wise men will not be caught with pretences nor be imposed upon with an empty profession, but they will enquire into our lives and actions, and by these they will make a judgment of us. They cannot see into our hearts nor pry into our understandings to discover what it is that we inwardly believe, they cannot discern those secret and supernatural principles that we pretend to be acted by: but this they can do, they can examine our actions and behold our good or bad works, and try whether our lives be indeed answerable to our profession, and do really excel the lives of other men who do not pretend to such great things. There are a great

many ſagacious perſons who will eaſily find us out, will look under our maſk, and ſee through all our fine pretenſions, and will quickly diſcern the abſurdity of telling the world that we believe one thing when we do the contrary.

If we profeſs to believe the Chriſtian religion, we expoſe our ſelves to the ſcorn and contempt of every diſcerning man if we do not live up to it. With what face can any man continue in the practice of any known ſin, that profeſſeth to believe the holy doctrine of the goſpel, which forbids all ſin under the higheſt and ſevereſt penalties? If we did but believe the hiſtory of the goſpel as we do any ordinary credible ſtory, and did we but regard the laws of Chriſtianity as we do the laws of the land; were we but perſuaded, that fraud and oppreſſion, lying and perjury, intemperance and uncleanneſs, covetouſneſs and pride, malice and revenge, the neglect of GOD and religion will bring men to hell as certainly as treaſon and felony will bring a man under the ſentence of the law: had we but the ſame awe and regard for the threatnings and promiſes of the goſpel that we have for the frowns and ſmiles of thoſe who are in power and authority, even this would be effectual to keep us from ſin. And if the goſpel have not this effect upon us it is an argument that we do not believe it.

It is to no purpoſe to go about to perſuade men that we do heartily entertain the doctrine of CHRIST, that doctrine which hath all the characters of piety and juſtice, of holineſs and virtue upon it; which obligeth men to "whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are chaſte, whatſoever things are lovely, and of good

SERM. VII.

"report," if we have no regard to these things in our lives. He that would know what a man believes, let him attend rather to what he does than to what he talks. He that leads a wicked life makes a more credible and effectual profession of infidelity than he who in words only denies the gospel. It is the hardest thing in the world to imagine that that man believes Christianity, who by ungodliness and worldly lusts does deny and renounce it. If we profess our selves Christians, it may justly be expected from us that we should evidence this by our actions, that we should live at another rate than the heathens did; that we, who worship a holy and just God, should not allow our selves the liberty to sin, as those did who worshipped such gods as were examples of sin and patrons of their vices. Thou who professest thy self a Christian mayest not walk in the lusts of the flesh and of uncleanness, as those did who worshipped a lustful Jupiter and a wanton Venus. Thou mayest not be intemperate, as those were who worshipped a drunken Bacchus. Thou mayest not be cruel and unmerciful, as those were who worshipped a fierce Saturn: nor mayest thou steal, as those did who worshipped a thievish Mercury. Thou must remember that thou art a Christian, and when thou art ready to debase thy self to any vile lust consider what title thou beareſt, by what name thou art called, whose disciple thou art; and then say to thy self, shall I allow my self in any impiety or wickedness of life, who pretend to be instructed by that grace of God which teaches men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts? Shall I cherish any sinful passion who pretend to have mortified all these, and to have "put off the old man with his deeds?"

SERM. VII.

It is not being gilded over with the external profession of Christianity that will avail us; our religion must be a vital principle inwardly to change and transform us. What the apostle says concerning circumcision, we may apply to them that are baptized and make an outward profession of Christianity; baptism verily profiteth if we obey the gospel, but if we walk contrary to the precepts of it our baptism is no baptism, and our Christianity is heathenism. If by our lives and actions we do contradict that religion which we profess, we do by this very thing prove our selves to be counterfeits and hypocrites; and that we have only taken up our religion for a fashion, and received it according to custom; we were born in a country where it is reverenced, and therefore we are of it. And the reason why we are Christians rather than Jews, or Turks, or Heathens, is because Christian religion had the fortune to come first in our way and to bespeak us at our entrance into the world.

Rom. ii. 25.

Are we not ashamed to take up a profession upon such slight grounds, and to wear about us such an empty title? It should make our blood to rise in our faces to consider what a distance there is between our religion and our lives. I remember Tully upbraids the philosophers very smartly for living unsuitably to their doctrines. A philosopher (saith he) is unpardonable if he miscarry in his life, *quod in officio cujus magister esse vult labitur; artemque vitæ professus, delinquit in vita*; "because he is faulty in that where-"in he pretends to be a master, and whilst he pro-"fesseth an art of living better than other men he mis-"carries in this life."[13] With how much greater reason may we challenge Christians for the miscarria-

SERM. VII.

ges of their lives, which are so directly contrary to their profession? It may be justly suspected that so perfect an institution as the gospel is, which the son of God came from heaven on purpose to propagate in the world, should make men more strictly holy and virtuous, and set the professors of it at a greater distance from all impurity and vice than ever any institution in the world did. If a man profess any other art or calling it is expected that he should be skill'd in it and excel those who do not pretend to it. 'Tis the greatest disparagement to a physician that can be, to say of him, that he is in other respects an excellent man, only he hath no great skill in diseases, and the methods of cure, because this is his profession: he might be pardon'd for other defects, but the proper skill of his art may justly be expected from him. So for a Christian; to say of him, the worst thing in him is his life; he is very orthodox in his opinions, but he's an ill-natur'd man, one of very violent passions, he will be very frequently drunk, he makes no conscience of his dealings, he is very uncharitable to all that differ from him: This man is faulty in his profession, he is defective in that which should be his excellency; he may have orthodox opinions in religion, but when all is done there is no such error and heresy, nothing so fundamentally opposite to religion as a wicked life. A Christian does not pretend to have a better wit or a more piercing understanding than a Turk or Heathen, but he professeth to live better than they, to be more chaste and more temperate, more just and charitable, more meek and gentle, more loving and peaceable than other men: if he fail in this, where is the art the man

boasts

boasts of? To what purpose is all this noise and stir about the gospel and the holy doctrine of CHRIST? If any man profess himself a Christian and do not live better than others, he is a mere pretender and mountebank in religion, he is a bungler in his own art, and unskill'd in his proper profession. This is the first, the indecency of the thing.

2. Consider how great a scandal this must needs be to our blessed SAVIOUR and his holy religion. The Christian religion hath undergone many a hard censure for the miscarriages of the professors of it. The impieties and vices of those who call themselves Christians have caused many sharp reflections upon Christianity, and made the Son of GOD and the blessed SAVIOUR of the world to wear the odious names of deceiver and impostor. If a man did design to do the greatest spite to religion he could not give it a deeper wound, he could not take a more effectual course to disparage it than by a lewd and debauched life. For this will still be an objection in the minds of those who are strangers and enemies to our religion. If the gospel were so excellent an institution as it is reported to be, surely we should see better effects of it in the lives of those who profess it. When we would persuade a heathen to our religion, and tell him how holy a GOD we serve, what excellent patterns we imitate, what spiritual and divine precepts of holiness and virtue our religion does contain; may not he reply, would you have me to believe you when I see you do not believe your selves? If you believed your religion you would live according to it. For if the gospel were every word of it false, if there were neither a heaven to be hoped for, nor a hell to be feared

SERM. VII.

ed after this life, how could many Christians live worse than they do?

As we would not proclaim to the world that the gospel is an unholy and vicious Institution, let us take heed that we bring no scandal upon it by our lives, lest the enemies of our religion say as Salvian tells us they did in his time, *Si Christus sancta docuisset Christiani sancte vixissent*, surely "if CHRIST had "taught so holy a doctrine Christians would have liv- "ed holier lives." Tully tells us that one of the shrewdest arguments that ever was brought against philosophy was this, *quosdam perfectos philosophos turpiter vivere*, "that some great philosophers led very "filthy lives." Celsus and Porphyry, Hierocles and Julian, among all their witty invectives against Christian religion, have nothing against it that reflects so much upon it as do the wicked lives of so many Christians. The greatest enmity to religion is to profess it and to live unanswerably to it.

This consideration ought greatly to affect us. I am sure the apostle speaks of it with great passion and vehemency, "for many walk of whom I have "told you often, and now tell you even weeping, "that they are enemies of the cross of CHRIST, "whose end is destruction, whose GOD is their bel- "ly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earth- "ly things." A Jew or a Turk is not so great an enemy to Christianity as a leud and vicious Christian. Therefore let me beseech Christians, as they tender the honour of their Saviour and the credit of their religion, that they would conform their lives to the holy precepts of Christianity. And if there be any who are resolved to continue in a vicious course,

Phil. iii. 18.

to

to the injury and disparagement of Christianity, I could almost entreat of them that they would quit their profession and renounce their baptism, that they would lay aside their title of Christians, and initiate themselves in heathenish rites and superstitions, or be circumcised for Jews or Turks: For it were really better, upon some accounts, that such men should abandon their profession, than keep on a vizard which serves to no other purpose but to scare others from religion. SERM. VII.

3. And lastly, let us consider the danger we expose our selves to by not living answerably to our religion. And this, I hope, may prevail upon such as are not moved by the former considerations. Hypocrites are instanced in scripture, as a sort of sinners that shall have the sharpest torments and the fiercest damnation. When our SAVIOUR would set forth the great severity of the LORD towards the evil servant he expresseth it thus, "he shall cut him in "sunder and appoint him his portion with hypo- "crites." So that the punishment of hypocrites seems to be made the measure and standard of the highest punishment. Thou professest to believe in CHRIST and to hope in him for salvation, but in the mean time thou livest a wicked and unholy life, thou dost not believe but presume on him, and wilt find at the great day that this thy confidence will be thy confusion, and he whom thou hopest will be thy advocate and SAVIOUR will prove thy accuser and thy judge. What our SAVIOUR says to the Jews, "there "is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye "trust," may very well be applied to false Christians, there is one that accuseth you and will condemn you, even JESUS in whom you trust. Mat. xxiv. 51. Joh. v. 45.

The

The profession of Christianity and men's having the name of CHRIST named upon them will be so far from securing them from hell, that it will sink them the deeper into it. Many are apt to pity the poor heathens who never heard of the name of CHRIST, and sadly to condole their case, but as our SAVIOUR said upon another occasion, "weep not for "them, weep for your selves." There's no such miserable person in the world as a degenerate Christian, because he falls into the greatest misery from the greatest advantages and opportunities of being happy. Dost thou lament the condition of Socrates, and Cato, and Aristides, and doubt what shall become of them at the day of judgment? and canst thou, who art an impious and prophane Christian, think that thou shalt escape the damnation of hell?

Dost thou believe that the moral heathen shall be cast out? and canst thou who hast led a wicked life under the profession of Christianity have the impudence to hope, that thou shalt sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of GOD? No, those sins, which are committed by Christians under the enjoyment of the Gospel, are of deeper dye and clothed with blacker aggravations than the sins of heathens are capable of. A pagan may live without GOD in the world, and be unjust towards men, at a cheaper rate and upon easier terms than thou who art a Christian. Better had it been thou hadst never known one syllable of the gospel, never heard of the name of Christ, than that having taken it upon thee thou shouldest not depart from iniquity. Happy had it been for thee, that thou hadst been born a Jew, or a Turk, or a poor Indian, rather than that being bred among

among Christians and professing thy self of that number, thou shouldst lead a vicious and unholy life.

I have insisted the longer upon these arguments, that I might, if possible, awaken men to a serious consideration of their lives, and persuade them to a real reformation of them; that I may oblige all those who call themselves Christians to live up to the essential and fundamental laws of our religion; to love GOD, and to love our neighbour; to do to every man as we would have him to do to us; to mortify our lusts, and subdue our passions, and sincerely to endeavour to grow in every grace and virtue, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by JESUS CHRIST to the praise and glory of GOD.

This indeed would become our profession and be honourable to our religion, and would remove one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of the gospel. For how can we expect that the doctrine of GOD our SAVIOUR should gain any considerable ground in the world, so long as by the unworthy lives of so many Christians 'tis represented to the world at so great disadvantage? If ever we would have Christian religion effectually recommended, it must be by the holy and unblameable lives of those who make profession of it. Then indeed it would look with so amiable a countenance as to invite many to it, and carry so much majesty and authority in it as to command reverence from it's greatest enemies, and make men to acknowledge that GOD is in us of a truth, and to glorify our Father which is in heaven.

" The good GOD grant that as we have taken up-
" on us the profession of Christianity, so we may
" be careful so to live that we may adorn the

" doctrine of GOD our SAVIOUR in all things;
" that the grace of GOD which bringeth ſalva-
" tion may teach us to deny ungodlineſs and
" worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly
" and godly in this preſent world; looking for
" that bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearing
" of the great GOD and our SAVIOUR JESUS
" CHRIST: to whom with the Father and the
" Holy Ghoſt, &c.

SERMON VIII.

Of the happineſs of a heavenly converſation.

PHIL. iii. 20.

For our converſation is in heaven.

SERM. VIII.

FOR the underſtanding of which words we need to look back no farther than the 18th verſe of this chapter, where the apoſtle with great vehemency and paſſion ſpeaks of ſome among the Philippians, who indeed profeſs'd Chriſtianity but yet would do any thing to decline ſuffering for that profeſſion; " there are many that walk, of whom " I have told you often, and now tell you even " weeping, that they are enemies to the croſs of CHRIST;

SERM. VIII.

" CHRIST;" they cannot endure to ſuffer with him and for him, they are ſo ſenſual and wedded to this world that they will do any thing to avoid perſecution; ſo he deſcribes them in the next verſe, " whoſe " end is deſtruction, whoſe GOD is their belly, whoſe " glory is in their ſhame, who mind earthly things." Now in oppoſition to theſe ſenſual and earthly-minded men the apoſtle gives us the character of the true Chriſtians, they are ſuch as mind heaven and another world, and prefer the hopes of that to all the intereſts of this life, " our converſation is in heaven."

For the right underſtanding of which phraſe be pleaſed to obſerve, that it is an alluſion to a city or corporation, and to the privileges and manners of thoſe who are free of it. And heaven is ſeveral times in ſcripture repreſented to us under this notion of a city. It is ſaid of Abraham that " he looked for a " city which hath foundations, whoſe builder and " maker is GOD." It is called likewiſe " the city " of the living GOD, the heavenly Jeruſalem." And the ſame apoſtle ſpeaking of the uncertain condition of Chriſtians in this world ſays of them, that " here " they have no continuing city, but look for one that " is to come.

Heb. xi. 10. Heb. xiii. 22. Heb. xiv. 14.

Now to this city the apoſtle alludes here in the text, when he ſays " our converſation is in heaven." For the word πολίτευμα, which is rendred converſation, may either ſignify the privilege of citizens, or their converſation and manners, or may take in both theſe.

In the firſt ſenſe of the privilege of citizens, we find πολιτεία a word of near affinity with this ſometimes uſed; " with a great ſum (ſays the Cap- Act. xxii. 28.

SERM. VIII.

tain to Paul) " obtained I τῷ πολιτείαν ταύτῃ, this " freedom." According to this sense, ἡμῶν τὸ πολίτευμα may very well be rendred, as Tertullian often does this text, *municipatus noster*, " our citizenship " is in heaven ;" an allusion perhaps, (as the learned Dr. Hammond observes) to those who though they were not born at Rome, and it may be lived at a great distance from it, had yet *jus civitatis Romanæ*, the privilege of Roman citizens. In like manner the apostle here describes the condition of Christians. 'Tis true, we are born here in this world and live in it, but we belong to another corporation ; we are denizens of another country and free of that city which is above.

In the other sense of the conversation of citizens we find the verb πολιτεύεσθε used towards the beginning of this epistle, " let your conversation be as it " becometh the gospel of CHRIST." And why may not the word πολίτευμα in the text, without any inconvenience, include both these? As if the apostle had said, there are some that mind earthly things, and are so addicted to them that rather than part with them they will forsake their religion ; but as for us, we consider that we are citizens of heaven, and accordingly we converse and demean our selves in this world, as those that are free of another city and do belong to it.

Phil. i. 27.

So that to have our conversation in heaven does imply these two things.

First, the serious thoughts and considerations of heaven.

Secondly, the effect which those thoughts ought to have upon our lives.

These

SERM. VIII.

Theſe two things take up the meaning of my text, and ſhall be the ſubject of the following diſcourſe.

I. The ſerious thoughts and conſiderations of heaven, that is, of the happy and glorious ſtate of good men in another life. And concerning this, there are two things principally which offer themſelves to our conſideration. Firſt, the happineſs of this ſtate. Secondly, the way and means whereby we may come to partake of this happineſs.

Firſt, we will conſider the happineſs of this ſtate. But what, and how great this happineſs is, I am not able to repreſent to you. Theſe things are yet in a great meaſure within the veil, and it does not now fully appear what we ſhall be. The ſcriptures have revealed ſo much in general concerning the reality and unſpeakable felicities of this ſtate as may ſatisfy us for the preſent, and ſerve to enflame our deſires after it, and to quicken our endeavours for the obtaining of it; as namely, that it is incomparably beyond any happineſs of this world; that it is very great; and that it is eternal; in a word, that it is far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine.

1. It is incomparably beyond any happineſs in this world. It is free from all thoſe ſharp and bitter ingredients which do abate and allay the felicities of this life. All the enjoyments of this world are mixed, and uncertain, and unſatisfying; nay ſo far are they from giving us ſatisfaction, that the very ſweeteſt of them are ſatiating and cloying.

None of the comforts of this life are pure and unmixt. There is ſomething of vanity mingled with all our earthly enjoyments, and that cauſeth vexation

SERM. VIII.

of ſpirit. There is no ſenſual pleaſure but is either purchaſed by ſome pain, or attended with it, or ends in it. A great eſtate is neither to be got without care, nor kept without fear, nor loſt without trouble. Dignity and greatneſs is troubleſom almoſt to all mankind, it is commonly uneaſy to them that have it, and it is uſually hated and envied by thoſe that have it not. Knowledge, that is one of the beſt and ſweeteſt pleaſures of human life; and yet if we may believe the experience of one, who had as great a ſhare of it as any of the ſons of men ever had, he will tell us, that "this alſo is vexation of ſpirit; for in much "wiſdom there is much grief, and he that encreaſeth "knowledge, encreaſeth ſorrow."

Eccleſ. i. 17, 18.

Thus it is with all the things of this world; the beſt of them have a mixture of good and evil, of joy and ſorrow in them: but the happineſs of the next life is free from allay and mixture. In the deſcription of the new Jeruſalem it is ſaid, that "there ſhall be "no more curſe, and there ſhall be no night there," nothing to imbitter our bleſſings, or obſcure our glory. Heaven is the proper region of happineſs, there only are pure joys and an unmingled felicity.

Rev. xxii. 3, 5.

But the enjoyments of this world, as they are mixed, ſo they are uncertain. So wavering and inconſtant are they, that we can have no ſecurity of them, when we think our ſelves to have the faſteſt hold of them, they ſlip out of our hands we know not how. For this reaſon Solomon very elegantly calls them things "that are not, Why wilt thou ſet thine eyes "upon that which is not? for riches certainly make "to themſelves wings and fly like an eagle towards "heaven." So fugitive are they, that after all our endeavours

endeavours to ſecure them they may break looſe from us, and in an inſtant vaniſh out of our ſight, "riches "make to themſelves wings and fly like an eagle," intimating to us that riches are often acceſſary to their own ruin. Many times the greatneſs of a man's eſtate, and nothing elſe, hath been the cauſe of the loſs of it, and of taking away the life of the owner thereof. The fairneſs of ſome mens fortune hath been a temptation to thoſe who have been more powerful to raviſh it from them, thus "riches make to themſelves "wings." So that he that enjoys the greateſt happineſs of this world does ſtill want one happineſs more, to ſecure to him for the future what he poſſeſſes for the preſent. But the happineſs of heaven is a ſteady and conſtant light, fixt and unchangeable as the fountain from whence it ſprings, "the father of lights, "with whom is no variableneſs nor ſhadow of turn-"ing." SERM. VIII.

And if the enjoyments of this life were certain, yet they are unſatisfying, This is the vanity of vanities, that every thing in this world can trouble us, but nothing can give us ſatisfaction. I know not how it is, but either we, or the things of this world, or both, are ſo phantaſtical, that we can neither be well with theſe things, nor well without them. If we be hungry, we are in pain; and if we eat to the full, we are uneaſy. If we be poor we think our ſelves miſerable, and when we come to be rich we commonly really are ſo. If we are in a low condition we fret and murmur, and if we chance to get up and to be raiſed to greatneſs we are many times farther from contentment than we were before. So that we purſue the happineſs of this world juſt as little children chaſe birds, when

SERM. VIII.

when we think we are come very near it, and have it almoſt in our hands, it flies farther from us than it was at firſt.

Nay, ſo far are the enjoyments of this world from affording us ſatisfaction, that the ſweeteſt of them are moſt apt to ſatiate and cloy us. All the pleaſures of this world are ſo contrived as to yield us very little happineſs. If they go off quickly they ſignify nothing, and if they ſtay long we are ſick of them. After a full draught of any ſenſual pleaſure we preſently loath it, and hate it as much after the enjoyment, as we courted it and longed for it in the expectation. But the delights of the other world, as they will give us full ſatisfaction ſo we ſhall never be weary of them. Every repetition of them will be accompanied with a new pleaſure and contentment. In the felicities of heaven theſe two things ſhall be reconciled, which never met together in any ſenſual delight, long and full enjoyment, and yet a freſh and perpetual pleaſure. As in GOD's "preſence there is "fulneſs of joy, ſo at his right hand there ſhall be "pleaſures for evermore."

The happineſs of the other life is not only incomparably beyond any happineſs of this world (that, it may be, is no great commendation of it) but it is very great in it ſelf. The happineſs of heaven is uſually in ſcripture deſcribed to us by ſuch pleaſures as are manly and excellent, chaſte and intellectual, infinitely more pure and refin'd than thoſe of ſenſe; and if the ſcripture at any time deſcend to the metaphors of a feaſt, and a banquet, and a marriage, it is plainly by way of accommodation to our weakneſs and condeſcenſion to our capacities.

But

SERM. VIII.

But the chief ingredients of this happineſs, ſo far as the ſcripture has thought fit to reveal it to us, are the perfection of our knowledge, and the height of our love, and the perpetual ſociety and friendſhip of all the bleſſed inhabitants of thoſe glorious manſions; and the joyful concurrence of all theſe in chearful expreſſions of gratitude, in the inceſſant praiſes and admiration of the fountain and author of all this happineſs. And what can be more delightful than to have our underſtandings entertain'd with a clear ſight of the beſt and moſt perfect being, with the knowledge of all his works and of the wiſe deſigns of his providence here in the world? than to live in the reviving preſence of GOD, and to be continually attending upon him whoſe favour is life, and whoſe glory is much more above that of any of the princes of this world, than the greateſt of them is above the pooreſt worm? The queen of Sheba thought Solomon's ſervants happy in having the opportunity, by ſtanding continually before him, to hear his wiſdom; but in the other world it ſhall be a happineſs to Solomon himſelf, and to the wiſeſt and greateſt perſons that ever were in this world, to ſtand before this great king to admire his wiſdom and to behold his glory. Not that I imagine the happineſs of heaven to conſiſt in a perpetual gazing upon GOD, and in an idle contemplation of the glories of that place. For as by that bleſſed ſight we ſhall be infinitely tranſported, ſo the ſcripture tells us we ſhall be alſo transform'd into the image of the divine perfections; we "ſhall "ſee GOD and we ſhall be like him," and what greater happineſs can there be than to be like the happieſt and moſt perfect being in the world? Beſides,

4.

SERM. VIII.

who can tell what employment GOD may have for us in the next life? We need not doubt but that he who is happineſs it ſelf, and hath promiſed to make us happy, can eaſily find out ſuch employments and delights for us in the other world as will be proper and ſuitable to that ſtate.

But then beſides the improvement of our knowledge there ſhall be the moſt delightful exerciſe of love. When we come to heaven we ſhall enter into the ſociety of the bleſſed angels and of " the ſpirits " of juſt men made perfect," that is freed from all thoſe paſſions and infirmities which do now render the converſation, even of the beſt men, ſometimes troubleſom to one another. We ſhall then meet with all thoſe excellent perſons, thoſe brave minds, thoſe innocent and charitable ſouls whom we have ſeen, and heard, and read of in this world. There we ſhall meet with many of our dear relations and intimate friends, and perhaps with many of our enemies, to whom we ſhall then be perfectly reconcil'd notwithſtanding all the warm conteſts and peeviſh differences which we had with them in this world, even about matters of religion. For heaven is a ſtate of perfect love and friendſhip, there will be nothing but kindneſs and good nature there, and all the prudent arts of endearment and wiſe ways of rendring converſation mutually pleaſant to one another. And what greater happineſs can be imagin'd than to converſe freely with ſo many excellent perſons, without any thing of folly or diſguiſe, of jealouſy or deſign upon one another? For then there will be none of thoſe vices and paſſions, of covetouſneſs and ambition, of envy and hatred, of wrath and peeviſhneſs, which

which do now ſo much ſpoil the pleaſure and diſturb the quiet of mankind. All quarrels and contentions, ſchiſms and diviſions will then be effectually hinder'd, not by force but by love, not by compulſion but by that charity which never fails; and all thoſe controverſies in religion, which are now ſo hotly agitated, will then be finally determin'd, not as we endeavour to end them now by canons and decrees, but by a perfect knowledge and convincing light.

And when this bleſſed ſociety is met together and thus united by love, they ſhall all join in gratitude to their great patrons and benefactors, "to him that "ſits upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was "ſlain, to GOD even our father, and to our LORD "JESUS CHRIST, who hath lov'd us and waſh'd us "from our ſins in his own blood." And they ſhall ſing everlaſting ſongs of praiſe to GOD for all his works of wonder, for the effects of that infinite goodneſs, and admirable wiſdom, and almighty power, which are clearly ſeen in the creation and government of the world and all the creatures in it; particularly for his favours to mankind, for the benefit of their beings, for the comfort of their lives, and for all his merciful providences towards them in this world: but above all for the redemption of their ſouls by the death of his ſon, for the free forgiveneſs of their ſins, for the gracious aſſiſtance of his holy Spirit, and for conducting them ſafely through all the ſnares and dangers, the troubles and temptations of this world to the ſecure poſſeſſion of that glory and happineſs which then they ſhall be partakers of, and are bound to praiſe GOD for to all eternity. This, this ſhall be the employment of the bleſſed ſpirits above, and theſe

SERM. VIII.

are the chief ingredients of our happineſs which the ſcripture mentions. And if there were no other, as there may be ten thouſand more for any thing I can tell, yet generous and virtuous minds will eaſily underſtand how great a pleaſure there is in the improvement of our knowledge, and the exerciſe of love, and in a grateful and perpetual acknowledgment of the greateſt benefits that creatures are capable of receiving.

3. This happineſs ſhall be eternal. And though this be but a circumſtance and do not enter into the nature of our happineſs, yet it is ſo material a one that all the felicities which heaven affords would be imperfect without it. It would ſtrangely damp and allay all our joys to think that they ſhould ſome time have an end. And the greater our happineſs were, the greater trouble it would be to us to conſider that it muſt have a period. It would make a man ſorrowful indeed to think of leaving ſuch vaſt poſſeſſions. Indeed if the happineſs of heaven were ſuch as the joys of this world are, it were fit they ſhould be as ſhort; for after a little enjoyment it would cloy us, and we ſhould ſoon grow weary of it: but being ſo excellent, it would ſcarce be a happineſs if it were not eternal. It would imbitter the pleaſures of heaven, as great as they are, to ſee to an end of them, though it were at never ſo great a diſtance; to conſider that all this vaſt treaſure of happineſs would one day be exhauſted, and that after ſo many years were paſt we ſhould be as poor and miſerable again as we were once in this world. God hath ſo ordered things, that the vain and empty delights of this world ſhould be temporary and tranſient, but that the

the great and ſubſtantial pleaſures of the other world ſhould be as laſting as they are excellent. For heaven as it is an exceeding, ſo it is an eternal weight of glory. And this is that which crowns the joy of heaven and baniſhes all fear and trouble from the minds of the bleſſed. And thus to be ſecured in the poſſeſſion of our happineſs is an unſpeakable addition to it. For that which is eternal as it ſhall never determine, ſo it can never be diminiſhed; for to be diminiſhed and to decay is to draw nearer to an end, but that which ſhall never have an end can never come nearer to it. SERM. VIII.

O vaſt eternity! how doſt thou ſwallow up our thoughts and entertain us at once with delight and amazement? This is the very top and higheſt pitch of our happineſs, upon which we may ſtand ſecure and look down with ſcorn upon all things here below; and how ſmall and inconſiderable do they appear to us, compared with the vaſt and endleſs enjoyments of our future ſtate? But oh vain and fooliſh ſouls! that are ſo little concern'd for eternity; that for the trifles of time, and "the pleaſures of ſin which are "but for a ſeaſon," can find in our hearts to forfeit an everlaſting felicity. Bleſſed GOD! why haſt thou prepared ſuch a happineſs for thoſe who neither conſider it, nor ſeek after it? "Why is ſuch a price put "into the hands of fools, who have no heart to make uſe "of it;" who fondly chuſe to gratify their luſts rather than to ſave their ſouls, and ſottiſhly prefer the temporary enjoyments of ſin before a bleſſed immortality.

4. And laſtly, this happineſs is far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine. It is ſo great that it cannot now enter into the heart of man. We

cannot

SERM. VIII.

cannot from the experience of any of thoſe pleaſures and delights which we have been acquainted withal in this world, frame an equal idea and conception of it. So that when we come to heaven we ſhall be ready to ſay of it as the queen of Sheba did of Solomon's wiſdom and proſperity, that "half of it hath not been "told us;" that the felicities and glories of that ſtate do far exceed all the fame which we have heard of them in this world. For who can ſay how great a good GOD is? and how happy he who is the fountain of happineſs can make thoſe ſouls that love him, and thoſe whom he loves?

In this imperfect ſtate we are not capable of a full repreſentation of thoſe glories. We cannot now ſee GOD and live. A full deſcription of heaven and of the pleaſures of that ſtate would let in joys upon us too big for our narrow capacities, and too ſtrong for weak mortality to bear. "We are now but children, "and we ſpeak as children, and underſtand and think "as children" concerning theſe things; but in the other ſtate we ſhall grow up to be men, and then we ſhall put away theſe childiſh thoughts; "now we "know but in part, but when that which is perfect "is come, that which is imperfect ſhall be done away; "now we ſee through a glaſs darkly (ἐν αἰνίγματι, in "a riddle) but then we ſhall ſee face to face; now "we know in part, but then we ſhall know even as "alſo we are known," as the apoſtle diſcourſeth excellently concerning this very matter.

1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10, 11.

No ſooner ſhall we enter upon the joys of the other world, but our minds ſhall be raiſed to a ſtrength and activity as much above that of the moſt knowing perſons in this world, as the thoughts of the greateſt philo-

philoſopher and wiſeſt man upon earth are above the thoughts of a child or a fool. No man's mind is now ſo well framed to underſtand any thing in this world, as our underſtandings ſhall then be fitted for the knowledge of GOD and of the things that belong to that ſtate. In the mean time let us bleſs GOD that he hath revealed ſo much of this happineſs to us as is neceſſary to excite and encourage us to ſeek after it. SERM. VIII.

The ſecond thing to be conſidered concerning our future happineſs, is the way and means whereby we may come to be made partakers of it. And that in ſhort is by the conſtant and ſincere endeavours of a holy life, in and through the mercies of GOD in our LORD JESUS CHRIST. CHRIST indeed is the author of our ſalvation, but obedience is the condition of it; ſo the apoſtle tells us, that CHRIST "is the author "of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him." It is the grace of GOD in the goſpel which brings or offers this ſalvation to us, but then it is by the "denying "of ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and by living ſo- "berly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent "world" that we are "to wait for the bleſſed hope." Our SAVIOUR promiſes this happineſs to the pure in heart, "bleſſed are the pure in heart, for they ſhall "ſee GOD;" and elſewhere the ſcripture doth exclude all others from any ſhare or portion in this bleſſedneſs; ſo the apoſtle aſſures us "that without holi- "neſs no man ſhall ſee the LORD." Heb. v. 1. Tit. ii. 11, 12. Heb. xiii. 14.

And holineſs is not only a condition but a neceſſary qualification for the happineſs of the next life. This is the force of St. John's reaſoning, "we ſhall be like "him, for we ſhall ſee him." To ſee GOD is to be happy, but unleſs we be like him we cannot ſee him.

SERM. VIII.

The ſight and preſence of GOD himſelf would be no happineſs to that man who is not like to GOD in the temper and diſpoſition of his mind. And from hence the apoſtle infers in the next verſe, "every man "that hath this hope in him purifieth himſelf even "as he is pure." So that if we live wicked lives, if we allow our ſelves in the practice of any known ſin, we interrupt our hopes of heaven and render our ſelves unfit for eternal life. By this means we defeat all the deſigns of GOD's grace and mercy towards us, and ſalvation it ſelf cannot ſave us if we make our ſelves incapable of that happineſs which GOD offers. Heaven is in ſcripture called "an inheritance among them "that are ſanctified, and the inheritance of the ſaints "in light;" ſo that it is not enough that this inheritance is promiſed to us, but we muſt be qualified and prepared for it, and "be made meet to be made par-"takers of it."

And this life is the time of our preparation for our future ſtate. Our ſouls will continue for ever what we make them in this world. Such a temper and diſpoſition of mind as a man carries with him out of this life he ſhall retain in the next. 'Tis true indeed, heaven perfects thoſe holy and virtuous diſpoſitions which are begun here; but the other world alters no man as to his main ſtate, "he that is filthy will be filthy "ſtill, and he that is unrighteous will be unrighteous "ſtill." If we do not in a good degree mortify our luſts and paſſions here, death will not kill them for us, but we ſhall carry them with us into the other world. And if GOD ſhould admit us ſo qualified into the place of happineſs, yet we ſhall bring that along with us which would infallibly hinder us from being happy

py. Our ſenſual inclinations and deſires would meet with nothing there that would be ſuitable to them, and we ſhould be perpetually tormented with thoſe appetites which we brought with us out of this world, becauſe we ſhould find nothing there to gratify them withal. For as the apoſtle ſays in another ſenſe, "the kingdom of GOD is not meats and drinks, but "righteouſneſs, and peace, and joy in the Holy "Ghoſt." The happineſs of heaven conſiſts in ſuch things as a wicked man hath no guſt and reliſh for. So that if a covetous, or ambitious, or voluptuous man were in heaven, he would be juſt like the rich man in hell, tormented with a continual thirſt, and burnt up in the flames of his own ardent deſires; and would not be able, amidſt all the plenty and treaſures of that place, to find ſo much as one drop of ſuitable pleaſure and delight to quench and allay that heat. So likewiſe our fierce and unruly paſſions; if we ſhould carry them with us into the other world, how inconſiſtent would they be with happineſs? They would not only make us miſerable our ſelves, but be a trouble to all thoſe with whom we ſhould converſe. If a man of an envious and malicious, of a peeviſh and paſſionate temper, were admitted into the manſions of the bleſſed, he would not only be unhappy himſelf, but would diſturb the quiet of others, and raiſe ſtorms even in thoſe calm regions. Vain man! that dreameſt of being happy without any diſpoſition or preparation for it. To be happy, is to enjoy what we deſire, and to live with thoſe whom we love. But there is nothing in heaven ſuitable to the deſires and appetites of a wicked man. All the joys of that place, and the delights of that ſtate are purely ſpiritual, and

SERM. VIII.

SERM. VIII.

are only to be reliſhed by thoſe who have "purified "themſelves as GOD is pure." But if thou be carnal and ſenſual, what are theſe things to thee? What happineſs would it be to thee to ſee GOD, and to have him always in thy view who was never in all thy thoughts; to be tied to live for ever in his company who is of a quite contrary temper and diſpoſition to thy ſelf, whoſe preſence thou dreadeſt, and whom whilſt thou waſt in this world thou couldſt never endure to think upon? So that the pleaſures of heaven it ſelf could ſignify no good or happineſs to that man who is not ſo diſpoſed as to take pleaſure in them. Heaven is too pure an air for corrupt ſouls to live and breathe in, and the whole employment and converſation of that place, as it would be unſuitable, ſo would it alſo be unacceptable to a ſenſual and vicious perſon.

From all this it appears how neceſſary it is for us to prepare our ſelves for this bleſſed ſtate, by the conſtant and ſincere endeavours of a holy life, and by mortifying every luſt and inordinate paſſion in our ſouls. For till this be done we are not meet to be made partakers of the felicities of the other world. And thus I have done with the firſt thing implied in this phraſe, "of having our converſation in hea-"ven," viz. the ſerious thoughts and conſiderations of heaven; or the happineſs of that ſtate, and of the way and means whereby that happineſs is to be attained.

II. The "having our converſation in heaven" does imply likewiſe the effect which thoſe conſiderations ought to have upon our hearts and lives: As,

I. To

SERM. VIII.

1. To convince us of the vanity of this world. GOD hath on purpoſe made this world troubleſom and uneaſy to us, that there might be no ſufficient temptation to reaſonable and conſiderate men to take them off from the care and thought of their future happineſs; that GOD and heaven might have no rival here below; that there might be nothing in this world that might pretend to our affection or court us with any advantage in compariſon of everlaſting life and glory.

When we come to die, and eternity ſhall preſent it ſelf to our ſerious and waking thoughts, then things will put on another face, and thoſe things which we valued ſo much in this life will then appear to be nothing worth; but thoſe things which we neglected, to be of infinite concernment to us, and worthy to have been the care and endeavour of our whole lives. And if we would conſider theſe things in time, while the opportunities of life and health are before us, we might be convinced at a cheaper rate, and come to be ſatisfied of the vanity of this world before we deſpaired of the happineſs of the other.

2. To make us very active and induſtrious to be as good, and to do as much good as we can in this life, that ſo we may be qualified and diſpoſed for the happineſs of the next. Men are uſually very induſtrious for the things of this life, to be rich and great in the world; did we but value heaven half as much as it deſerves we ſhould take infinitely more pains for that. So often as we conſider the glories that are above, how does it accuſe our ſloth and condemn our folly, that we are leſs concerned for our ſouls than moſt men are for their bodies, that we will not labour half ſo

SERM. VIII.

much for an eternal inheritance as men ordinarily do for theſe corruptible things?

Let us remember that we are haſting apace to another world, and that our eternal happineſs now lies at the ſtake. And how ſhould it quicken our endeavours to have ſuch a reward ſet before us, to have crowns and ſcepters in our eyes? would we but often repreſent to our minds the glorious things of another world, what fervors ſhould we feel in our hearts? we ſhould be all life, and ſpirit, and wing; and ſhould do GOD's will, almoſt with the ſame reaſon and delight, as the angels do "who continually be- "hold the face of their father." The conſideration of heaven and the firm perſuaſion of our future happineſs ſhould actuate all the powers of our ſouls, and be continually inſpiring us with new vigour in the ways of holineſs and virtue. How ſhould this thought ſwell our reſolutions and confirm our purpoſes of obedience, that if we have our "fruit unto holineſs our "end will be everlaſting life?

3. To mitigate and lighten the evils and afflictions of this life. It is no great matter how rough the way be, provided we be ſure that it leads to happineſs. The incomparably greater good of the next life will to a wiſe and conſiderate man weigh down all the evils of this. And the ſcripture tells us that there is no compariſon between them. "The ſuf- "ferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be "compared with the glory which ſhall be revealed "in us." The evils of this life afflict men more or leſs according as the ſoul is fortified with conſiderations proper to ſupport us under them. When we conſider that we have but a little while to be here, that

Rom. viii. 18.

that we are upon our journey travelling towards our heavenly country where we ſhall meet will all the delights we can deſire, it ought not to trouble us much to endure ſtorms and foul ways, and to want many of thoſe accommodations we might expect at home. This is the common fate of travellers, and we muſt take things as we find them, and not look to have every thing juſt to our mind. Theſe difficulties and inconveniencies will ſhortly be over, and after a few days will be quite forgotten, and be to us as if they had never been. And when we are ſafely landed in our own country, with what pleaſure ſhall we look back upon thoſe rough and boiſterous ſeas which we have eſcaped? The more troubles we have paſt through, the kinder uſage we ſhall find when we come to our father's houſe. So the apoſtle tells us, that "our light affliction which is but for a moment, "worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal "weight of glory." When we come to heaven our happineſs ſhall then be as real as our miſeries were here upon earth, and far greater and more laſting. And what great matter is it though we ſuffer a while in this world, provided we eſcape the endleſs unſufferable torments of the next; though we have not our good things in this life, if infinitely greater be reſerved for us, and we ſhall receive them with intereſt in the other?

Several of the evils and calamities of this life would be inſufferable indeed, if there were nothing better to be hoped for hereafter. If this were true, Chriſtians would not only be of all men but of all creatures the moſt miſerable. But our religion hath abundantly aſſured us to the contrary. And the aſſurance of this

was

SERM. VIII.

was that which made the primitive Chriſtians to embrace ſufferings with ſo much cheerfulneſs, " to glory " in tribulation, and to take joyfully the ſpoiling " of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a " better and more enduring ſubſtance." The ſeven brethren in the hiſtory of the Maccabees upon this perſuaſion would " not accept deliverance, that they " might obtain a better reſurrection." The ſtorm of ſtones which was poured upon St. Stephen was no more to him than a common ſhower when " he ſaw " the heavens opened, and JESUS (in whoſe cauſe he ſuffered) " ſtanding on the right hand of GOD."

4. To make us ſincere in all our profeſſions, words and actions. Did men firmly believe the rewards of another world their religion would not be only in ſhew and pretence, but in life and reality, no man would put on a form of godlineſs that were deſtitute of the power of it; we ſhould do nothing for the opinion of others, but all with regard to GOD and our own conſciences; and be as curious of our thoughts, and moſt retired actions, as if we were in an open theatre and in the preſence of the greateſt aſſembly. For in the next life men ſhall not be rewarded for what they ſeemed to be, but for what they really were in this world. Therefore whatever we think, or ſpeak, or do, we ſhould always remember that the day of revelation is coming, when the ſecrets of all hearts ſhall be diſcloſed, when all diſguiſes ſhall be laid aſide, and every ones maſk ſhall be taken off, and all our actions and deſigns ſhall be brought upon the publick ſtage and expoſed to the view of men and angels. " There is nothing now hidden which " ſhall not then be revealed, nor ſecret which ſhall " not be made known.

5. To

SERM. VIII.

5. To arm us againſt the fears of death. Death is terrible to nature, and the terror of it is infinitely encreaſed by the fearful apprehenſions of what may follow it. But the comfortable hopes of a bleſſed immortality do ſtrangely relieve the fainting ſpirits of dying men, and are able to reconcile us to death, and in a great meaſure to take away the terror of it. I know that the thoughts of death are diſmal even to good men, and we have never more need of comfort and encouragement than when we are conflicting with this laſt enemy, and there is no ſuch comfortable conſideration to a dying man as the hopes of a happy eternity. He that looks upon death only as a paſſage to glory, may welcome the meſſengers of it as bringing him the beſt and moſt joyful news that ever came to him in his whole life, and no man can ſtay behind in this world with half the comfort that this man leaves it.

And now I have done with the two things implied in this phraſe, of "having our converſation in heaven," viz. the ſerious thoughts and conſiderations of heaven, and the effect of theſe thoughts and conſiderations upon our hearts and lives.

I crave your patience but a little longer, till I make ſome reflection upon what hath been delivered concerning the happineſs of good men after this life. I have told you that it is incomparably beyond any happineſs of this world, that it is great in it ſelf, and eternal in it's duration, and far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine. And now after all this, I am very ſenſible how much all that I have ſaid comes ſhort of the greatneſs and dignity of the thing. So that I could almoſt begin again and make a new

SEKM. VIII.

attempt upon this ſubject. And indeed who would not be loth to be taken off from ſo delightful an argument? Methinks 'tis good for us to be here, and to let our minds dwell upon theſe conſiderations. We are unworthy of heaven, and unfit to partake of ſo great a glory, if we cannot take pleaſure in the contemplation of thoſe things now, the poſſeſſion whereof ſhall be our happineſs for ever.

With what joy then ſhould we think of thoſe "great "and glorious things which GOD hath prepared for "them that love him, of that inheritance incorrup- "tible, undefiled, which fadeth not away, reſerved "for us in the heavens?" How ſhould we welcome the thoughts of that happy hour, when we ſhall make our eſcape out of theſe priſons, when weſhall paſs out "of this howling wilderneſs into the promiſed land," when we ſhall be removed from all the troubles and temptations of a wicked and ill-natured world; when we ſhall be paſt all ſtorms, and ſecured from all farther danger of ſhipwreck, and ſhall be ſafely landed in the regions of bliſs and immortality?

O bleſſed time! "when all tears ſhall be wiped "from our eyes, and death and ſorrow ſhall be no "more; when mortality ſhall be ſwallowed up of "life," and we ſhall enter upon the poſſeſſion of all that happineſs and glory which GOD hath promiſed, and our faith hath believed, and our hopes have raiſed us to the expectation of; when we ſhall be eaſed of all our pains, and reſolved of all our doubts, and be purged from all our ſins, and be freed from all our fears, and be happy beyond all our hopes, and have all this happineſs ſecured to us beyond the power of time and change; when we ſhall know GOD and o-

ther

ther things without ſtudy, and love him and one another without meaſure, and ſerve and praiſe him without wearineſs, and obey his will without the leaſt reluctancy; and ſhall ſtill be more and more delighted in the knowing, and loving, and praiſing, and obeying of GOD to all eternity. SERM. VIII.

How ſhould theſe thoughts affect our hearts, and what a mighty influence ought they to have upon our lives? The great diſadvantage of the arguments fetched from another world is this, that thoſe things are at a great diſtance from us, and not ſenſible to us; and therefore are not apt to affect us ſo ſtrongly, and to work ſo powerfully upon us. Now to make amends for this diſadvantage we ſhould often revive theſe conſiderations upon our minds, and inculcate upon our ſelves the reality and certainty of theſe things together with the infinite weight and importance of them. We ſhould reaſon thus with our ſelves; if good men ſhall be ſo unſpeakably happy, and conſequently wicked men ſo extremely miſerable in another world: if theſe things be true and will one day be found to be ſo, why ſhould they not be to me as if they were already preſent? Why ſhould not I be as much afraid to commit any ſin as if hell were naked before me, and I ſaw the aſtoniſhing miſeries of the damned? And why ſhould I not be as careful to ſerve GOD and keep his commandments, as if heaven were open to my view, and I ſaw JESUS ſtanding at the right hand of GOD with crowns of glory in his hand ready to be ſet upon the heads of all thoſe who continue faithful to him?

The lively apprehenſions of the nearneſs of death and eternity are apt to make men's thoughts more

SERM. VIII.

quick and piercing, and according as we think our ſelves prepared for our future ſtate to tranſport us with joy, or to amaze us with horror. For the ſoul that is fully ſatisfied of his future bliſs is already entred into heaven, has begun to take poſſeſſion of glory, and has (as it were) his bleſſed SAVIOUR in his arms, and may ſay with old Simeon, "LORD, now letteſt thou "thy ſervant depart in peace, for mine eyes have "ſeen thy ſalvation." But the thoughts of death muſt needs be very terrible to that man who is doubtful or deſpairing of his future condition. It would daunt the ſtouteſt man that ever breathed, to look upon death when he can ſee nothing but hell beyond it. When the apparition at Endor told Saul, "to "morrow thou and thy ſons ſhall be with me," theſe words ſtruck him to the heart, ſo that "he fell "down to the ground, and there was no more "ſtrength left in him." It is as certain that we ſhall die as if an expreſs meſſenger ſhould come to every one of us from the other world and tell us ſo. Why ſhould we not then always live as thoſe that muſt die, and as thoſe that hope to be happy after death? To have theſe apprehenſions vigorous and lively upon our minds, this is "to have our converſation in hea-"ven, from whence alſo we look for our SAVIOUR, "the LORD JESUS CHRIST, who ſhall change our "vile body that it may be faſhioned like unto his "glorious body, according to the working of that "mighty power whereby he is able even to ſubdue "all things to himſelf."

SER-

SERMON IX.

Of the end of judgments, and the reason of their continuance.

ISA. ix. 12, 13.

For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill: for the people turneth not unto him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the LORD *of hoſts.*

SERM. IX.

IN the former part of the 12th verſe, the prophet threatens that Iſrael ſhould be brought into great diſtreſs and be ſet upon by enemies on every ſide, the Syrians before and the Philiſtines behind, and that they ſhould devour Iſrael with open mouth: and though this was like to be a very ſore and dreadful judgment, yet he foretels that this would not ſtay GOD's hand nor ſatisfy his anger, becauſe he foreſaw that they would ſtill grow worſe and continue impenitent. "For all this his anger is not turned away, "but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill: for the people "turneth not unto him that ſmiteth them, neither "do they ſeek the LORD of hoſts.

In which words there are theſe two things very uſeful at all times, but at this time eſpecially moſt proper and ſeaſonable for our conſideration.

1. The deſign and intention of GOD in ſending judgments upon a people; and that is to reclaim them

SERM. IX.

from their ſins, implied in theſe words, " for the " people turneth not to him that ſmiteth them ;" which intimate to us that this is the end which GOD aims at in his judgments, to take us off from our ſins and to bring us to himſelf.

2. The reaſon of the continuance of GOD's judgments, becauſe the people were not reclaimed by them. And this is fully expreſt in the text, that therefore " GOD's anger is not turned away, but his hand is " ſtretched out ſtill, becauſe the people turneth not " unto him that ſmiteth them," &c.

Of theſe two I crave leave to ſpeak, as plainly and briefly as I can.

1. The deſign and intention of GOD in ſending judgments upon a people ; and that is to reclaim them from their ſins. This indeed is the intention of all GOD's diſpenſations towards us in this world. The end of all his mercies and benefits is to take us off from ſin, and to oblige and win us to our duty : So the apoſtle tells us Rom. ii. 4. that the deſign of GOD's goodneſs and long ſuffering and forbearance towards us, is, to lead us to repentance.

And this is the way wherein GOD delights to deal with us. The way of judgment and ſeverity is that which he is more averſe from, a courſe which he unwillingly takes with us and not without ſome difficulty and reluctancy. " He doth not afflict willing- " ly, nor grieve the children of men :" and were it not that we are ſuch perverſe creatures as not to be wrought upon by kindneſs, ſo wild as not to be tamed by gentle uſage, GOD would not handle us in any other way. It is our obſtinacy and intractableneſs to the methods of his goodneſs which conſtraineth,

and

and almoſt forceth him againſt his inclination, to take the rod into his hand and to chaſtiſe us with it. He would draw us with "the cords of love and the bands "of a man," (as he expreſſeth himſelf in the prophet) but we will not follow him: and therefore we provoke him to turn thoſe cords into whips, and to change the gentle methods of his kindneſs into ways of harſhneſs and ſeverity. SERM. IX.

And yet when he comes to take this courſe with us, he ſtill like a kind and tender-hearted Father aims at our benefit and advantage. He deſigns kindneſs to the ſons of men by all thoſe judgments, which do not kill them and cut them off from the opportunity and poſſibility of improving them. If he ſends evils upon us, it is that thereby he may do us ſome greater good: if he afflicts us, it is not becauſe it is pleaſant to him to deal harſhly with us, but becauſe it is profitable and neceſſary for us to be ſo dealt with: and if at any time he imbitter our lives by miſeries and ſufferings, it is becauſe he is loth to ſee us periſh in pleaſant ways, and chuſeth rather to be ſomewhat ſevere towards us than ſuffer us to be utterly undone.

This Moſes declares to have been the great end of all the ſevere providences of GOD towards the people of Iſrael in their long wandring in the Wilderneſs, and all the difficulties and hardſhips they were there exerciſed withal for the ſpace of forty years, Deut. viii. 15, 16. "Who led thee through that great and "terrible wilderneſs, wherein were fiery ſerpents and "ſcorpions," &c. "that he might humble thee, "and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at "thy latter end."

So

So that the afflicting providences of GOD are not only apt in their own nature to do us good, but which is a more expreſs argument of the divine goodneſs GOD intends and aims at this end by them: he does not ſend Judgments upon this theatre of the world for his ſport and paſtime, nor ſet on one part of his creation to bait another for his own diverſion: he does not, like ſome of the cruel Roman emperors take pleaſure to exerciſe men with dangers and to ſee them play bloody prizes before him.

Nay, he does nothing that is ſevere out of humour and paſſion; as our earthly parents many times do. Indeed he is angry with us for our ſins, but yet ſo as ſtill to pity our perſons: and when his providence makes uſe of any ſharp and cutting inſtruments, it is with this merciful deſign, to let out our corruption: if he caſt us into the furnace of affliction, it is that he may refine and purify us from our droſs.

So that though the judgments of GOD be evils in themſelves, yet conſidering the intentions of GOD in them they are no real objections againſt his goodneſs, but rather arguments for it; as will appear if we conſider theſe three things.

1. That the judgments of GOD are proper for the cure of a far greater evil of another kind.

2. They are proper for the prevention of far greater evils of the ſame kind.

3. They are not only proper to theſe ends, but in many caſes very neceſſary.

Firſt, "the judgments of GOD are very proper for "the cure of a far greater evil of another kind;" I mean the evil of ſin. We take wrong meaſures of things, when we judge thoſe to be the greateſt evils which afflict our

our bodies, wound our reputation, and impoveriſh our eſtates. For thoſe certainly are far the greateſt which affect our nobleſt part; which vitiate our underſtandings, and deprave our wills, and wound and defile our ſouls. What corrupt humours are to the body, that ſin is to the ſouls of men, their diſeaſe and their death. SERM. IX.

Now it is very agreeable with the goodneſs and mercy of the divine providence, to adminiſter to us whatever is proper for the cure of ſo great an evil. If we make our ſelves ſick, that is our own folly, and no fault of the phyſician; but we are beholden to him if he recover us, though it be by very bitter and unpleaſing means. All temporal judgments which are ſhort of death, are properly medicinal; and if we will but ſuffer them to have their kindly operation upon us, they will work a cure; and how grievous and diſtaſtful ſoever they may be for the preſent, they will prove mercies and bleſſings in the iſſue. Upon this account David reckons afflictions among the happy bleſſings of his life, Pſalm. cxix. 71. "It is good for me (ſays he) "that I have been afflict-"ed;" and he gives the reaſon of it in the ſame Pſalm, ver. 67. "before I was afflicted I went aſtray, "but now I have learnt thy precepts."

So that though all afflictions are evils in themſelves yet they are good for us, becauſe they diſcover to us our diſeaſe and tend to our cure. They are a ſenſible argument and conviction to us of the evil and danger of ſin. We are commonly ſuch fools as Solomon ſpeaks of, who make a mock of ſin; and like children will be playing with the edge of it till it cut and wound us: we are not ſufficiently ſenſible how great

an

SERM. IX.

an evil it is till we come to feel the dismal effects and consequences of it. And therefore to rectify our apprehensions concerning it God makes us to suffer by it. Thus Elihu describes to us the happy effect of afflictions upon sinners, Job xxxvi. 8, 9, 10. "If they "be bound in fetters and held in cords of affliction, "then God sheweth them their work and their transgression that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline and commandeth that "they return from their iniquity." God doth but invite and intreat us by his mercies, but his judgments have a more powerful and commanding voice. "When he holds men in cords of affliction, then he "openeth their ear to discipline." In prosperity we are many times incapable of council and instruction; but when we are under God's correcting hand then we are fit to be spoken withal.

Secondly, the judgments of God are likewise proper for the preventing of far greater evils of the same kind; I mean farther punishments. In sending of temporal judgments upon sinners, God usually proceeds with them by degrees: first he lets fly several single shots at them, and if upon these they will take warning and come in, they may prevent the broad-sides and volleys of his wrath.

But the great advantage of all this is, that temporal judgments may prove to us the opportunities of preventing the miserable and unspeakable torments of a long eternity. For all judgments which are not final, leaving men a space for repentance, have in them the mercy of a reprieve, which by a serious and timely return to God may be improved into a pardon.

Besides, that adversity and afflictions do usually dis-

poſe men, and put them into a fit temper for repentance; they fix our minds and make us ſerious, and are apt to awaken us to conſideration, and ſuggeſt to us ſuch thoughts and meditations as theſe: if temporal evils be ſo grievous, how inſupportable then will be the extreme and endleſs torments of the next life? If in this day of GOD's grace and patience we ſometimes meet with ſuch ſeverity, what may we not look for in the day of vengeance? If theſe drops of GOD's wrath, which now and then fall upon ſinners in this world, fill them with ſo much anguiſh and affliction, how deplorably miſerable will thoſe wretches be upon whom the ſtorms of his fury ſhall fall? Who would venture to continue in ſin, when the greateſt miſeries and calamities which we feel in this life are but a ſmall and inconſiderable earneſt of thoſe woful wages, which ſinners ſhall receive in the day of recompence? SERM. IX.

Thirdly, the judgments of GOD are not only proper to theſe ends, but in many caſes very neceſſary. Our condition many times is ſuch as to require this ſevere way of proceeding, becauſe no other courſe that GOD hath taken, or can take with us, will probably do us good. GOD does not delight in the miſeries and calamities of his creatures, but we put him upon theſe extremities, or rather his own goodneſs and wiſdom together do prompt and direct him to theſe harſh and rigorous ways. May be we have brought our ſelves into that dangerous ſtate, and the malignity of our diſtemper is ſuch that it is not to be removed without violent phyſick, and that cannot be adminſtred to us without making us deadly ſick.

So that the judgments of GOD, which are many times abroad in the earth, are nothing elſe but the wiſe methods which the great phyſician of the world uſes for the cure of mankind; they are the rods of his ſchool and the diſcipline of his providence, that "the inhabitants of the world may learn righteouſneſs;" They are a merciful invention of heaven to do men that good which many times nothing elſe will, and to work that bleſſed effect upon us, which neither the wiſe counſels and admonitions of GOD's word, nor his milder and gentler dealings with us can uſually attain.

Thus we find in the parable, Luke xv. that the providence of GOD makes uſe of hunger and extreme neceſſity to bring home the prodigal; and by him our SAVIOUR repreſents to us the temper of moſt ſinners: For till we have ſpent that ſtock of mercies which GOD hath given us, till we come to be pinched with want and are ready to periſh, we are not apt to entertain thoughts of returning to our father.

It may be there are ſome ſinners which are more tractable and eaſy to be reduced to goodneſs, that are not ſo headſtrong and obſtinate in their way but that they may be reclaimed by milder and ſofter means: but there are likewiſe a great many ſenſeleſs and outragious ſinners, who are madly and furiouſly bent upon their own ruin: Now to treat theſe fairly, with the allurements of kindneſs and the gentle arts of perſuaſion, would be to no purpoſe: The only way that is left of dealing with them, is rigour and ſeverity. When ſinners are thus beſides themſelves, ſomething that looks like cruelty is perhaps the greateſt mercy that can be ſhown to them; nothing ſo

proper

proper for ſuch perſons as a dark room, and a ſpare diet, and ſevere uſage; "a rod for the back of fools," as the wiſe-man ſpeaks.

Thus I have done with the firſt thing I propounded to ſpeak to, namely, the merciful deſign and intention of GOD in ſending judgments upon a people, which is to bring them to repentance, and by repentance to prevent their ruin. I proceed to the

II. The Reaſon of the continuance of GOD's judgments, becauſe the people were not reclaimed by them; therefore "his anger is not turned away, but his hand "is ſtretched out ſtill," becauſe "the people turneth "not to him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek "the LORD of hoſts.

And how can it be expected it ſhould be otherwiſe, when incorrigibleneſs under the judgments of GOD is a provocation of ſo high a nature, a ſign of a moſt depraved and incorrigible temper, and an argument of the greateſt obſtinacy in evil? Upon this account we find that the holy ſpirit of GOD in ſcripture brands Ahaz as a ſingular and remarkable ſort of ſinner, (2 Chron. xxviii. 22.) becauſe "in the time of his "diſtreſs he ſinned yet more againſt the LORD." The longer Pharaoh and the Egyptians reſiſted the judgments of GOD the more ſtill they were hardened, and the more they were plagued: Levit. xxvi. 22. after GOD had there threatned his people with ſeveral ſore judgments for their ſins, he tells them, that if they "will not be reformed by all theſe things" he will "puniſh them ſeven times more," and after that "ſeven times more for their ſins:" and if in ſuch a caſe the juſt GOD will puniſh ſeven times more, we may ſafely conclude that ſins after judgments are ſeven times greater.

SERM. XI.

So likewiſe Deut. xxviii. after a long and dreadful catalogue of curſes there denounced againſt the people of Iſrael in caſe of their diſobedience, GOD at laſt threatens them with a foreign enemy that ſhould "diſtreſs them in their gates;" and if they would not be reclaimed by all this he tells them, that he hath ſtill more and greater judgments for them in ſtore, v. 58, and 59. "if thou wilt not obſerve to do all the "words of this law, that thou mayeſt fear this great "and glorious name, THE LORD THY GOD, then "the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful." If we be of ſo ſtrange and monſtrous a diſpoſition as to grow worſe under judgments, GOD will deal with us after an unuſual and prodigious manner, he will make our plagues wonderful.

This incorrigible temper the prophets of old every where make the great aggravation of the ſin of Iſrael, Iſa. i. 4, 5. "ah ſinful nation, a people laden with ini-"quity;" and after a great many other expreſſions to ſet forth what heinous ſinners they were, he ſums up all in this, that they were ſo far from being reformed by the ſeveral judgments of GOD which had been inflicted upon them, that they were the worſe for correction; "why ſhould they be ſtricken any "more? they will revolt more and more." So likewiſe, Hoſ. vii. 9, 10, Ephraim, though brought very low, is repreſented as of the ſame refractory temper, "ſtrangers have devoured his ſtrength, &c. but "they do not return to the LORD, nor ſeek him for "all this." I will mention but one text more (and methinks it bears but too near a reſemblance with our own condition, both in reſpect of the judgments which have been upon us, and our carriage under them)

them) Amos iv. where GOD upbraids his people ſeveral times with this as the great aggravation of their ſins. That they continued impenitent under all thoſe terrible judgments of GOD which had been upon them; "I have ſent among you (ſays he) fa- "mine," and then "peſtilence," and then the "ſword," and laſt of all a terrible "fire" which had almoſt utterly conſumed them, verſ. 11. "I have overthrown "ſome of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, "and ye were as a firebrand pluckt out of the burn- "ing; yet have ye not returned unto me." And becauſe all theſe judgments had not been effectual to reclaim them, he tells them that he was reſolved to go on in puniſhing; and therefore he bids them to expect it and prepare themſelves for it, verſ. 12. "therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Iſrael; and "becauſe I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet "thy GOD, O Iſrael." When GOD hath begun to puniſh a people and they are not amended by it, the honour of his juſtice is concerned to proceed, and not to give over. By every ſin that we commit we offend GOD, but if he ſmite us, and we ſtand out againſt him, then do we contend with him and ſtrive for maſtery. And when the ſinner is upon theſe ſtubborn and inſolent terms, then prepare to meet thy GOD; a bitter ſarcaſm, as if man could be a match for GOD, and a poor weak creature in any wiſe able to encounter him to whom power belongs. There's a ſevere expreſſion concerning GOD's dealing with ſuch perverſe and obſtinate ſinners, Pſal. xviii. 26. "with the froward thou wilt ſhew thy ſelf froward," or, as the words may more properly and conveniently be rendred, "with the froward thou wilt wreſtle."

SERM. XI.

SERM. IX.

God will not be out-braved by the sins of men, and therefore if we continue impenitent we have all the reason in the world to expect that God should go on to punish.

But to come nearer to our selves and to consider our own case, which is in truth so very bad that we may almost be afraid to consider it. The wise and good God, like a prudent and indulgent father, hath used all the arts of his providence towards this nation to reclaim us. He hath invited us to him by many blessings, but we would not come; so (to borrow an apt illustration from a great * divine of our own) we have forced him to deal with us as Absalom did with Joab; he sent one civil message to him after another, but he would not come; at last he sets on fire his corn-field to try whether that would bring him: this course God hath taken with us, we would not be perswaded by messages of kindness (by his many blessings and favours) to return to him, and therefore hath he sent amongst us the terrible messengers of his wrath. First we were engaged in a foreign war, and though God was pleased to give us some considerable success in it, yet it seems our provocations were so great that he was resolved to punish us. He was loth to let us fall into the hands of men, and therefore he took the work into his own hand, and punished us himself, by sending a pestilence amongst us, the sorest and most destructive that hath befallen this nation for many ages. But we did not upon this, return to him, and therefore his fierce anger kindled a fearful fire amongst us, which hath laid the honour of our nation, one of the greatest and richest cities in

* Bishop Sanderson.

the

the world in the duſt; and that by ſo ſudden and irreſiſtible, ſo diſmal and amazing a devaſtation, as in all the circumſtances of it is ſcarce to be parallel'd in any hiſtory.

I doubt not but moſt of us were mightily affected with this judgment whilſt it was upon us. So aſtoniſhing a calamity could not but make us open our eyes a little, and awaken us to conſideration; even the rich man in the goſpel, though he had all his lifetime been immerſed in ſenſuality, yet could not but "lift up his eyes when he was in flames."

And ſurely GOD expects that ſuch judgments as theſe ſhould not only rouze us a little for the preſent, but that they ſhould have a permanent operation and effect upon us, and work a thorough and laſting reformation amongſt us; but yet I am afraid that this dreadful fire hath had no other influence upon us but what it uſes to have upon metals, which are only melted by it for the preſent, but when the fire is removed they ſuddenly cool and return to their former hardneſs.

One would have thought that the ſenſe of ſuch a calamity as this ſhould have remained longer upon us. Methinks GOD ſeemed to ſay to us after this judgment as he did once to Jeruſalem, Zeph. iii. 7. "ſurely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive inſtruc-"tion;" but we (like them) have been but the more forward to provoke him, "(they roſe early and cor-"rupted their doings)" we have after all this, "har-"dened our hearts from his fear and refuſed to return." And therefore GOD is now come to one of his laſt judgments, "our enemy diſtreſſeth us in our gates." GOD hath begun to "let us fall into the hands of men,"

and

SERM. IX.

and by giving our enemies a ſudden and fatal advantage upon us hath ſmitten us with a breach great as the ſea.

Theſe were terrible calamities indeed to come ſo thick and ſo ſwiftly upon us, "like deſolation, and "as a whirlwind." Such a quick ſucceſſion of judgments, treading almoſt upon one another's heels, does but too plainly declare that GOD is highly incenſed againſt us. For ſurely theſe are not the wounds of a friend, but the terrible aſſaults of an enemy. They do not look like the diſpleaſure of a father, but the ſeverity of a judge, not like viſitation, but like vengeance.

And beſides theſe more viſible judgments upon the nation, we are by a ſecret curſe of GOD inſenſibly decayed in our riches and ſtrength. We are, I know not how, ſtrangely impoveriſht in the midſt of plenty, and almoſt undone by victories. And which adds to our miſery, few among us ſeem to be ſufficiently ſenſible of it, or to take any notice by what ſilent ſteps and imperceptible degrees (like gray hairs and the infirmities of old age) poverty and weakneſs are ſtealing in upon us: ſo that we may fitly apply to our ſelves what the prophet ſays of Ephraim. Hoſ. vii. 9. "ſtrangers have devoured his ſtrength, and "he knoweth it not; yea gray hairs are here and "there upon him, and yet he knoweth it not."

And our condition, as we are a church, is not much better. How is this famous proteſtant church of ours, which was once the admiration of her friends and the envy of her enemies, ſunk and declined in her glory, and reduced into a very narrow compaſs? So that ſhe is left like the daughter of Sion, (Iſa. i. 8.)

"as

" as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden " of cucumbers, as a beſieged city:" ſtraitned and hemmed in on all parts, by the impudence of atheiſm, the inſolencies of popery, and the turbulency of faction; all which do every day viſibly and apace gain ground upon her, and diſtreſs her on every ſide; juſt as the condition of the Jewiſh church is deſcribed before my text, " the Syrians before, and the Philiſ- " tines behind, both ready to devour Iſrael with o- " pen mouth." SERM. IX.

And ſurely it is not for nothing that GOD hath brought us thus low, that he hath ſent all theſe judgments upon us, and that he doth ſtill threaten us with more: the reaſon is plain, becauſe we are ſtill impenitent; " the people turneth not to him that ſmit- " eth them." There hath been almoſt an univerſal degeneracy amongſt us, and there is ſtill, I fear, a general impenitency, " the people turneth not," &c. Notwithſtanding all thoſe diſmal calamities which our eyes have ſeen, wickedneſs doth ſtill prevail in the nation and overflows it like a mighty deluge, ſo as to overſpread all ranks and orders of men: and not only ſo, but is grown impudent and appears with a whore's forehead; all kind of modeſty ſeems to have forſaken the ſinners of this age.

And is this repentance? to live in filthy and abominable luſts, to tear the name of GOD by horrid oaths and imprecations; to be atheiſtical and prophane, and by an unexampled boldneſs to turn the word of GOD it ſelf, and the graveſt and moſt ſerious matters of religion into raillery? This is not " to turn " to him that ſmiteth us," but to turn upon him and ſmite him again. And yet ſuch crying and clamo-

SERM. IX.

rous sins as these are almost come to be the garb and fashion of the nation, and to be accounted the wit and gallantry of the age.

And "shall not GOD visit for these things? "shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as "this?" Yes, he hath visited; and it is for these things that the wrath of GOD hath been so manifestly revealed from heaven against us. For this cause "misery and destruction have been in our way, and "the way of peace have we not known," because there hath been "no fear of GOD before our eyes." Hence it is that "GOD's anger is not turned away, "but his hand is stretched out still, because the peo- "ple turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither "do they seek the LORD of hosts."

But do not we seek GOD? Do we not every day acknowledge our sins to him, and pray that he would "have mercy upon us miserable offenders, and grant "that we may hereafter live godly, righteous and so- "ber lives?" Do not we "seek the LORD of hosts," when we continually beg of him to save and "deli- "ver us from the hand of our enemies?" Indeed we do thus seek him, but we should first turn to him; otherwise if we hope our prayers will prevail with GOD to do us good we do but trust in lying words. If we go on in our sins our very prayers will become sin, and increase our guilt: For "the prayer of the "wicked (that is, of one that is resolved to contin- ue so) "is an abomination to the LORD." Can we think it reasonable for men to address themselves to GOD after this manner? "LORD, though we have "no mind to turn to thee, yet we pray thee turn a- "way thine anger from us; though we are resolved

"not

" not to forſake our ſins, yet we make no doubt " but thy mercy will forgive them; Give peace in " our time, O Lord, that we may purſue our luſts " ſecurely and without diſturbance: deliver us we " pray thee from the hands of our enemies, that we " may ſin againſt thee without fear all the days of " our lives." Would it not be horrible impudence and impiety to put up any ſuch petitions to GOD? and yet this, I fear, is the moſt genuine interpretation of our prayers and lives compared together. SERM. IX.

And if this be our caſe, what can we expect? GOD may give us peace with our enemies, but then he will find out ſome other way to puniſh us: For if we ſtill perſiſt in our atheiſm and prophaneneſs, in our contempt of GOD and of his holy worſhip, in our ſcorn and deriſion of religion, in our abominable luſts and horrid impieties, what can we look for but that GOD ſhould " be angry with us until he have " conſumed us and there be no eſcaping?" Nothing can be a ſadder preſage of our ruin, than not to be reformed by thoſe dreadful judgments of GOD which have been upon us. This was that which brought final deſtruction upon the Egyptians in the Red Sea, that they had held out ſo obſtinately againſt ſo many judgments, and had been hardened under ten plagues. To be impenitent after ſuch ſevere corrections, is to poiſon our ſelves with that which is intended for our phyſick, and by a miraculous kind of obſtinacy to turn the rods of GOD into ſerpents.

And now perhaps ſome will be apt to ſay, that theſe are things fit for men of our profeſſion, becauſe it is our trade and we live by it. Indeed they are ſo, things very fit to be ſaid, and withal very fit for

SERM. IX.

every one to consider, who professeth himself a Christian, and who owns the belief of a GOD, and a providence, and another world. And if they be so, where is the fault? Is it, that there is a peculiar profession of men whose proper work it is to tell men of their faults, and to persuade them to reform? No, there is no harm in that neither. Is it then that they live by their profession, and yet would be believed? Yes, there lies the force of the objection. To which I shall only at present return this answer, that men do not argue thus in other cases, when yet the reason seems to be the very same. In matters that concern their bodies and estates, the physician and the lawyer are believed, though it is verily thought that they live by their professions as well as we; why then should men deal so partially and unequally only with their souls? Were we not moved by better principles, and swayed by the arguments and considerations of another world, we might, for ought we know, with every whit as much advantage to our selves, suffer men to be quiet and to sleep on securely in their sins; if we did not believe our selves in these matters, what should hinder but that we might with as much gravity and confidence cry peace, peace, when there is no peace; and flatter men with as much art and with as good a grace, as any of those can do who "live "delicately and wear soft clothing?"

But "we believe" the threatnings of GOD, and "therefore do we speak: we know the terrors of "the LORD," and therefore we endeavour "to per-"suade men." And oh! that we could persuade them to "break off their sins by righteousness, and to "turn every one from the evil of his way, and from "the

" the violence that is in his hands: and then who " can tell but GOD may turn and repent, and turn " away from his fierce anger that we periſh not ?

" The good GOD make us all wiſe to know in this " our day the things that belong to our peace, be- " fore they be hid from our eyes ; and grant that we " may all turn to him that hath ſmitten us, by repen- " tance and real reformation of our lives ; that GOD " may be pleaſed to turn away his anger from us, " and to ſtretch out his hand for our deliverance ; " which we humbly beg of him for the ſake of " CHRIST. To whom with the Father, &c."

SERMON X.

Of the deceitfulneſs and danger of ſin.

HEB. iii. 13.

Exhort one another daily, while it is called to day, leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.

SERM. X.

AMong the many conſiderations which the word of GOD and our own reaſon offer to us to diſcourage us from ſin this is none of the leaſt conſiderable, that he that once engages in a vicious courſe is in danger to proceed in it, being inſenſibly trained on from one degree of wickedneſs to another : ſo that the farther he advances, his retreat grows more difficult, becauſe he is ſtill puſhed on with

SERM. X.

with a greater violence. All error, as well of practice as of judgment, is endleſs; and when a man is once out of the way, the farther he ſhall go on the harder he will find it to return into the right way. Therefore there is great reaſon why men ſhould be ſo often cautioned againſt the beginnings of ſin; or if they have been ſo unhappy as to be ingaged in a bad courſe, why they ſhould be warned to break it off preſently and without delay, leſt by degrees they be hardened in their wickedneſs, till their caſe grow deſperate and paſt remedy. And to this purpoſe is the apoſtle's advice here in the text; "exhort one ano- "ther daily, while it is called to day, leſt any of you "be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin."

From which words I ſhall

1. Endeavour to repreſent to you the growing danger of ſin, and by what ſteps and degrees bad habits do inſenſibly gain upon men and harden them in an evil courſe.

2. I ſhall from this conſideration take occaſion to ſhew what great reaſon and need there is to warn men of this danger, and to endeavour to reſcue them out of it. And then

3. I ſhall apply my ſelf to the duty here in the text, of exhorting men with all earneſtneſs and importunity to reſiſt the beginnings of ſin; or if they be already entred upon a wicked courſe, to make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate; "leſt any of you be hard- "ened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin;

I. Firſt, I ſhall endeavour to repreſent to you the growing danger of ſin, and by what ſteps and degrees bad habits do inſenſibly gain upon men and harden them in an evil courſe. All the actions of men which

are

are not natural, but proceed from deliberation and choice, have ſomething of difficulty in them when we begin to practiſe them, becauſe at firſt we are rude and unexerciſed in that way: but after we have practiſed them awhile they become more eaſy: and when they are eaſy, we begin to take pleaſure in them: and when they pleaſe us we do them frequently, and think we cannot repeat them too often; and by frequency of acts a thing grows into a habit; and a confirmed habit is a ſecond kind of nature; and ſo far as any thing is natural ſo far it is neceſſary, and we can hardly do otherwiſe; nay, we do it many times when we do not think of it. For by virtue of a habit a man's mind or body becomes pliable and inclined to ſuch kind of actions as it is accuſtomed to, and does as it were ſtand bent and charged ſuch a way; ſo that being touched and awakened by the leaſt occaſion, it breaks forth into ſuch or ſuch actions. And this is the natural progreſs of all habits indifferently conſidered, whether they be good or bad. SERM. X.

But vicious habits have a greater advantage, and are of a quicker growth. For the corrupt nature of man is a rank ſoil to which vice takes eaſily, and wherein it thrives apace. The mind of man hath need to be prepared for piety and virtue; it muſt be cultivated to that end, and ordered with great care and pains: but vices are weeds that grow wild and ſpring up of themſelves. They are in ſome ſort natural to the ſoil, and therefore they need not to be planted and watered, it is ſufficient if they be neglected and let alone. So that vice having this advantage from our nature, it is no wonder if occaſion and temptation eaſily draw it forth.

But

But that we may take a more diſtinct account of the progreſs of ſin and by what ſteps vice gains upon men, I ſhall mark out to you ſome of the chief and more obſervable gradations of it.

1. Men begin with leſſer ſins. No man is perfectly wicked on the ſudden. *Sunt quædam vitiorum elementa*; "there are certain rudiments of vice," in which men are firſt entered, and then they proceed by degrees to greater and fouler crimes. For vice hath it's infancy and tender age, and it's ſeveral ſtates of growth. Men are not ſo totally degenerate but at firſt they are aſhamed when they venture upon a known ſin, though it be but ſmall in compariſon. Hence it is that at firſt men are very ſolicitous to palliate and hide their faults by excuſes, but after they have frequently committed them, and they grow too viſible to be concealed, then they will attempt to defend and maintain them; and from thence they come by degrees to take pleaſure in them, and in thoſe that do the ſame things.

Juven.

2. After men have been ſome time initiated in theſe leſſer ſins, by the commiſſion of theſe they are prepared and diſpoſed for greater; ſuch as lay waſte the conſcience, and offer more violence to the light and reaſon of their minds. By degrees a ſinner may grow to be ſo hardy as to attempt thoſe crimes which at firſt he could not have had the thought of committing without horror. Like Hazael, who when he was told by the prophet Eliſha what barbarous cruelties he ſhould one day be guilty of towards the people of Iſrael when he ſhould come to be king of Syria, he abominated the very thought and mention of them; "Is thy ſervant a dog that he ſhould do this great thing?"

" thing?" and yet for all this we know he did it afterwards. 'Tis true indeed when a ſinner is firſt tempted to the commiſſion of a more groſs and notorious ſin, his conſcience is apt to boggle and ſtart at it, he doth it with great difficulty and regret; the terrors of his own mind and the fears of damnation are very troubleſom to him; but this trouble wears off by degrees, and that which was at firſt difficult does by frequent practice and long cuſtom become tolerable. SERM. X.

3. When a man hath proceeded thus far he begins to put off ſhame, one of the greateſt reſtraints from ſin which GOD hath laid upon human nature. And when this curb once falls off, there is then but little left to reſtrain and hold us in. At firſt ſetting out upon a vicious courſe men are a little nice and delicate, like young travellers, who at firſt are offended at every ſpeck of dirt that lights upon them; but after they have been accuſtomed to it, and have travelled a good while in foul ways, it ceaſeth to be troubleſom to them to be daſhed and beſpattered.

4. After this, it is poſſible, men may come to approve their vices. For if men's judgments do not command their wills and reſtrain their luſts, it is great odds in proceſs of time the vicious inclinations of their wills will put a falſe biaſs upon their judgments; and then it is no wonder if men come to boaſt of their ſins and to glory in their vices, when they are half perſuaded that they are generous and commendable qualities. Thus much is certain in experience, that ſome men have gotten ſo perfect a habit of ſome ſins as not to know and take notice many times when they commit them. As in the caſe of ſwearing, which ſome men have ſo accuſtomed themſelves to that

5.

SERM. X.

without any conſideration they do of courſe put an oath or two into every ſentence that comes from them. And it hath been obſerved of ſome perſons that they have told an untruth ſo often, and averred it with ſo much confidence, till at laſt, forgetting that it was a lie at firſt, they themſelves have in proceſs of time believed it to be true.

5. From this pitch of wickedneſs men commonly proceed to draw in others and to make proſelytes to their vices. Now this ſignifies not only a great approbation of ſin but even a fondneſs for it, when men are not content to ſin upon their own ſingle accounts, but they muſt turn zealous agents and factors for the devil; become teachers of ſin and miniſters of unrighteouſneſs, and are factiouſly concerned to propagate together with their atheiſtical principles their lewd practices, and to draw followers and diſciples after them.

And when they are arrived to this height it is natural for them to hate reproof, and to reſiſt the means of their recovery; to quarrel againſt all the remedies that ſhall be offered to them, and to count thoſe their greateſt enemies who have ſo much courage and kindneſs as to deal plainly with them, and to tell them the truth. And then all the wiſe counſels of GOD's word, and the moſt gentle and prudent admonitions in the world, when they are tendered to ſuch perſons, ſerve only to provoke their ſcorn or their paſſion. And ſurely that man is in a ſad caſe that is ſo diſpoſed, that in all probability he will turn the moſt effectual means of his amendment into the occaſion of new and greater ſins.

But

SERM X.

But that which renders the condition of ſuch perſons much more ſad and deplorable is, that all this while GOD is withdrawing his grace from them. For every degree of ſin cauſeth the holy ſpirit of GOD with all his bleſſed motions and aſſiſtances to retire farther from them: and not only ſo, but the devil (that evil ſpirit which the ſcripture tells us, "works "effectually in the children of diſobedience") does, according as men improve in wickedneſs, get a greater and a more eſtabliſhed dominion over them. For as they who are reclaimed from an evil courſe are ſaid in ſcripture to be "reſcued out of the ſnare "of the devil," and to be "turned from the power "of Satan unto GOD;" ſo on the other hand, the farther men advance in the ways of ſin, ſo much the farther they depart from GOD, from under the influence of his grace, and the care of his protection and providence; and they give the devil (who is not apt to neglect his advantages upon them) greater opportunities every day to gain the firmer poſſeſſion of them.

And thus by paſſing from one degree of ſin to another, the ſinner becomes hardened in his wickedneſs and does inſenſibly ſlide into that in which without a miraculous grace of GOD he is like for ever to continue. For the mind of man, after it hath been long accuſtomed to evil, and is once grown old in vice, is almoſt as hard to be rectified as it is to recover a body bowed down with age to it's firſt ſtreightneſs. The ſcripture ſpeaks of ſome that "commit ſin with "greedineſs, and that drink up iniquity as the ox "drinketh up water," with a mighty appetite and thirſt, as if they were not able to refrain from it. And

SERM. X.

to expreſs to us the miſerable condition of ſuch perſons it repreſenteth them as perfect ſlaves to their vices, that have ſold themſelves to do wickedneſs and "are led captive by Satan at his pleaſure." And when men have brought themſelves to this paſs, they are almoſt under a fatal neceſſity of ſinning on. I do not believe that GOD hath abſolutely predeſtinated any man to ruin, but by a long courſe of wilful ſin men may in a ſort predeſtinate themſelves to it, and chuſe wickedneſs ſo long till it almoſt becomes neceſſary, and till they have brought themſelves under all imaginable diſadvantage of contributing any thing towards their own recovery; being bound in the chains of their own wickedneſs and held in the cords of their ſins: Nay, like Sampſon, not only bound by thoſe luſts which they have embraced, but likewiſe robbed of all their ſtrength whereby they ſhould break looſe from thoſe bonds. GOD grant that none of us may ever have the woful experience of it: But I am horribly afraid it is too true, that a ſinner may arrive to that confirmed ſtate of impiety as almoſt totally to loſe his liberty to do better: he may attain to that perfection in vice, as to continue to be a bad man upon the ſame account that the Hiſtorian extravagantly ſays Cato was virtuous, *Quia aliter eſſe non potuit*; becauſe he could not be otherwiſe. "Can "the Ethiopian change his ſkin, or the Leopard his "ſpots?" It is the ſcripture compariſon, to ſet forth to us how hard a thing it is for a man to be brought to goodneſs that hath been long accuſtomed to do evil. He that is thus deeply engaged and entangled in a bad courſe will ſcarce ever have the heart and reſolution to break looſe from it, unleſs he be forced

Vell. Paterc.

ced violently out of it by ſome ſevere affliction, by a ſharp ſickneſs, or by a terrible calamity, or by the preſent apprehenſions of death and the terrors of a future judgment. Nor will theſe be effectual neither to change ſuch a perſon without an extraordinary degree of GOD's grace; which conſidering the greatneſs and the continuance of his provocations, he hath very little reaſon to expect or hope GOD ſhould ever beſtow upon him. Wretched man! that haſt brought thy ſelf into this miſerable ſtate, out of which there is but juſt a poſſibility left of thy being reſcued; that haſt neglected thy diſeaſe ſo long till it is almoſt too late to apply remedies; that haſt provoked GOD ſo far and ſinned to ſuch a prodigious height, that thou haſt reaſon almoſt to deſpair both of his grace and aſſiſtance for thy repentance, and of his mercy for thy pardon. I ſpeak not this to diſcourage even the greateſt of ſinners from repentance. Though their caſe be extremely difficult, yet it is not quite deſperate. For "thoſe things which ſeem impoſſible "with men, are poſſible with GOD." But I ſpeak it on purpoſe to ſtop ſinners in their courſe and to diſcourage men from going on in ſin till they be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of it, and have brought themſelves by inſenſible degrees into that dangerous and difficult ſtate which I have all this while been repreſenting to you. I come now to the SERM. X.

II. Second thing I propounded, which was from this conſideration to ſhew what great reaſon and need there is to warn men of this danger, and to endeavour to reſcue them out of it. The apoſtle directs this precept to all Chriſtians. "Exhort one another daily,

SERM. X.

" daily, leſt any of you be hardened through the de-
" ceitfulneſs of ſin." That is, leſt you be hardened by degrees and finally ruined. And ſurely every man is concerned to do what in him lies to reſcue his brother from ſo imminent a danger; it is every one's place and duty to endeavour to ſave thoſe whom he ſees ready to periſh, much more does it concern thoſe who are peculiarly ſet apart for this work, I mean the miniſters of GOD's holy word, whoſe proper office and buſineſs it is to " exhort and warn every man
" day and night," who are " ſet as watchmen to the
" houſe of Iſrael," and whoſe blood in caſe any of them miſcarry through our neglect ſhall be required at our hands. So that if we believe the threatnings of GOD which we declare to others, if we have any apprehenſion of the dreadful miſery of another world, if we have any ſenſe of our own duty and ſafety, if we have any pity for periſhing ſouls, we cannot but be very importunate with ſinners to look about them, and to conſider their danger, and to bethink themſelves ſeriouſly of the miſerable event and iſſue of a wicked life: we cannot but be earneſt with them to
" break off their ſins, and to give glory to GOD by
" repentance, before darkneſs come and their feet
" ſtumble upon the dark mountains." When we are convinced more fully than we can deſire that " mi-
" ſery and deſtruction are in their ways," when we plainly ſee the evil day haſting towards them apace and " deſtruction coming upon them like a whirl-
" wind;" heaven above threatning them, and " hell
" beneath moving her ſelf to meet them at their
" coming," can we poſſibly do leſs than to warn ſuch perſons " to flee from the wrath which is to come,"

and out of a ſad apprehenſion of the danger that hangs over them, to caution them againſt it, and endeavour with all our might to reſcue them from the miſery which is ready to ſwallow them up? Indeed one would be apt to think it a very vain thing to diſſuade men from being miſerable, to uſe great vehemency of argument to hinder a man from leaping into a pit, or from running into the fire; to take great pains to argue a ſick man into a deſire of health, and to make a priſoner contented to have his ſhackles knocked off, and to be ſet at liberty: one would think all this were perfectly needleſs: but yet we ſee in experience ſin is a thing of ſo ſtupifying a nature as to make men inſenſible of their danger, although it be ſo near, and ſo terrible. It is not ſo with men in other caſes: When we labour of any bodily diſtemper, it is much to find a man that is patient of his diſeaſe; but when our ſouls are mortally ſick, that we ſhould be contented with our condition, and fond of our diſeaſe, that we ſhould fight with our phyſician, and ſpurn at our remedy; this ſurely is the height of diſtraction, for men to be thus abſolutely bent upon their own ruin, and to reſolve to make away themſelves for ever. And we who are the meſſengers of GOD to men muſt be born of the rocks, and have hearts harder than the nether milſtone, if we can patiently look on and endure to ſee men periſh without uſing our utmoſt endeavour to ſave them. Therefore I ſhall in the

SERM. X.

III. Third and laſt place apply my ſelf to this work of exhortation, the duty commanded here in the text. And here I ſhall addreſs my ſelf to two ſorts of perſons:

1. To

1. To perſuade thoſe who are yet innocent of great crimes to reſiſt the beginnings of ſin, leſt it gain upon them by degrees.

2. To preſs and urge thoſe that are already entred upon a wicked courſe, that they would make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate; leſt at laſt "they be "hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin."

1. To perſuade thoſe who are yet in ſome meaſure innocent to reſiſt the beginnings of ſin, leſt it gain upon them by degrees. Vice may eaſily be diſcouraged at firſt. It is like a ſlight diſeaſe, which is eaſy to be cured, but dangerous to be neglected. The firſt approaches of ſin and temptation are uſually very modeſt, but if they be not diſcountenanced they will ſoon grow upon us and make bolder attempts. Every inclination to ſin, every compliance with temptation is a going down the hill: while we keep our ſtanding we may command our ſelves, but if we once put our ſelves into violent motion downward we cannot ſtop when we pleaſe.

Omne in præcipiti vitium ſtetit ——

"all vice ſtands upon a precipice," and to engage in any ſinful courſe is to run down the hill. And if we once let looſe the propenſions of our nature we cannot gather in the reins and govern them as we pleaſe: If we give way to preſumptuous ſins they will quickly get dominion over us. It is much eaſier not to begin a bad courſe than to put a ſtop to our ſelves after we have begun it. *Stulta res eſt nequitiæ modus*, it is a fond thing for a man to think to ſet bounds to himſelf in any thing that is bad, to reſolve to ſin in number, weight and meaſure, with great temperance

Seneca.

and

and meaſure, with great temperance and diſcretion, and government of himſelf: that he will commit this ſin and then give over, entertain but this one temptation, and after that he will ſhut the door and admit of no more. Our corrupt hearts when they are once in motion, they are like the raging ſea, to which we can ſet no bounds, nor ſay to it "hither-"to ſhalt thou go and no further." Sin is very cunning and deceitful, and does ſtrangely gain upon men when they once give way to it. It is of a very bewitching nature, and hath ſtrange arts of addreſs and inſinuation: the giving way to a ſmall ſin does marvellouſly prepare and diſpoſe a man for a greater: by giving way to one little vice after another the ſtrongeſt reſolution may be broken. For though it be not to be ſnapt in ſunder at once, yet by this means it is untwiſted by degrees, and then it is eaſy to break it one thread after another. It is ſcarce imaginable of what force one ſinful action is to produce more: for ſin is very teeming and fruitful; and though there be no bleſſing annext to it, yet it does ſtrangely encreaſe and multiply. As there is a connexion of one virtue with another, ſo vices are linkt together, and one ſin draws many after it. When the devil tempts a man to commit any wickedneſs, he does as it were lay a long train of ſins, and if the firſt temptation take, they give fire to one another. Let us then reſiſt the beginnings of ſin, becauſe then we have moſt power, and ſin hath leaſt. This is the firſt. SERM. X.

2. To perſuade thoſe who are already engaged in a wicked courſe, to make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate. And there is no other way to get out of it but by repentance, that is, by a real change and reforma-

SERM. X.

tion of our lives; for herein the nature of true repentance does conſiſt. And without this all the devices, which men uſe to get rid of the guilt of their ſins, are vain and to no purpoſe. 'Tis not to be done by a formal confeſſion and abſolution, nor by a long pilgrimage, nor by one of thoſe little tickets from Rome which they call indulgences. A wiſe man would much ſooner perſuade himſelf that God will not at all puniſh the ſins of men, than that he would forgive them ſo eaſily, and receive great offenders to favour upon ſuch ſlight terms. Let us not deceive our ſelves, there is one plain way to heaven, by ſincere repentance and a holy life, and there is no getting thither by tricks. And without this change of our lives all our ſorrow and faſting and humiliation for ſin, which at this ſeaſon we make profeſſion of, will ſignify nothing. There is an excellent paſſage of the ſon of Sirach to this purpoſe, Eccleſ. xxxiv. 25, 26. "He that waſheth himſelf after the touching "of a dead body, if he touch it again what availeth "his waſhing? So is it with a man that faſteth "for his ſins, and goeth again and doth the ſame "things, who will hear his prayer, or what doth his "humbling profit him?" There is this plain difference between trouble for ſin and repentance; ſorrow only reſpects ſins paſt, but repentance is chiefly preventive of ſins for the future: and God therefore requires that we ſhould be troubled for our ſins, that we may reſolve to leave them.

And to oblige us to a vigorous and ſpeedy reſolution in this matter, let us conſider that we have engaged too far already in a bad courſe; and that every day our retreat will grow more dangerous and difficult;

cult; that by our delays we make work for a ſadder and longer repentance than that which we do now ſo ſtudiouſly decline: let us conſider likewiſe, that our life is concerned in the caſe; that "except we repent "and turn, we ſhall die:" and that the evil day may overtake us while we are deliberating whether we ſhould avoid it or not; that vice is ſo far from being mortified by age, that by every day's continuance in it we increaſe the power of it; and ſo much ſtrength as we add to our diſeaſe we certainly take from our ſelves; and this is a double weakning of us, when we do not only loſe our own ſtrength, but the enemy gets it and employs it againſt us. The deceitfulneſs of ſin appears in nothing more than in keeping men off from this neceſſary work, and perſuading them to hazard all upon the unreaſonable hopes of the mercy of GOD, and the uncertain reſolution of a future repentance. I do not think there are any here but do either believe, or at leaſt are vehemently afraid that there is another life after this; and that a wicked life, without repentance, muſt unavoidably make them miſerable in another world; and that to caſt off all to a death-bed repentance, puts things upon a mighty hazard. And they have a great deal of reaſon to think ſo: for alas, how unfit are moſt men at ſuch a time for ſo great and ſerious a work as repentance is, when they are unfit for the ſmalleſt matters? and how hard is it for any man, then to be aſſured of the truth and reality of his repentance, when there is no ſufficient opportunity to make trial of the ſincerity of it? I deny not the poſſibility of the thing; but it is much to be feared that the repentance of a dying ſinner is uſually but like the ſorrow of a malefactor, SERM. X.

when he is ready to be turned off; he is not troubled that he hath offended the law, but he is troubled that he muſt die. For when death is ready to ſeize upon the ſinner, and he feels himſelf dropping into deſtruction, no wonder if then the man's ſtomach come down, and he be contented to be ſaved; and ſeeing he muſt ſtay no longer in this world, be deſirous to go to heaven rather than hell; and in order to that, be ready to give ſome teſtimonies of his repentance: no wonder if when the rack is before him this extort confeſſion from him, and if in hopes of a pardon he make many large promiſes of amendment, and freely declare his reſolution of a new and better life. But then it is the hardeſt thing in the world to judge whether any thing of all this that is done under ſo great a fear and force be real. For a ſick man as he hath loſt an appetite to the moſt pleaſant meats and drinks, ſo likewiſe his ſinful pleaſures and fleſhly luſts are at the ſame time nauſeous to him, and for the very ſame reaſon: for ſickneſs having altered the temper of his body, he hath not at that time any guſt or reliſh for theſe things. And now he is reſolved againſt ſin, juſt as a man that hath no ſtomach is reſolved againſt meat. But if the fit were over, and death would but raiſe his ſiege and remove his quarters a little farther from him, it is to be feared that his former appetite would ſoon return to him, and that he would ſin with the ſame eagerneſs he did before. Beſides, how can we expect that God ſhould accept of our repentance at ſuch a time, when we are conſcious to our ſelves that we did reſolve to put off our repentance till we could ſin no longer? Can we think it fit for any man to ſay thus to God

in

in a dying hour; "LORD, now the world leaves me, I come to thee. I pray thee give me eternal life, who could never afford to give thee one good day of my life: grant that I may live with thee and enjoy thee for ever, who could never endure to think upon thee. I muſt confeſs that I could never be perſuaded to leave my ſins out of love to thee, but now I repent of them for fear of thee: I am conſcious to my ſelf that I would never do any thing for thy ſake, but yet I hope thy goodneſs is ſuch that thou wilt forgive all the ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of my life, and accept of this forced ſubmiſſion which I now make to thee. I pray thee do not at laſt fruſtrate and diſappoint me in this deſign which I have laid, of ſinning while I live and getting to heaven when I die." Surely no man can think it fit to ſay thus to GOD; and yet I am afraid this is the true interpretation of many a man's repentance who hath deferred it till he comes to die. I do not ſpeak this to diſcourage repentance, even at that time. It is always the beſt thing we can do. But I would by all means diſcourage men from putting off ſo neceſſary a work till then. It is true indeed when it is come to this, and a ſinner finds himſelf going out of the world, if he have been ſo fooliſh and ſo cruel to himſelf as to put things upon this laſt hazard, repentance is now the only thing that is left for him to do; this is his laſt remedy and the only refuge he has to fly to: and this is that which the miniſter in this caſe ought by all means to put the man upon, and earneſtly to perſuade him to. But when we ſpeak to men in other circumſtances, that are well and in health,

SERM. X.

we dare not for all the world encourage them to venture their ſouls upon ſuch an uncertainty. For to ſpeak the beſt of it, it is a very dangerous remedy, eſpecially when men have deſignedly contrived to rob GOD of the ſervice of their beſt days, and to put him off with a few unprofitable ſighs and tears at the hour of death. I deſire to have as large apprehenſions of the mercy of GOD as any man, but withal, I am very ſure that he is the hardeſt to be impoſed upon of any one in the world. And no man that hath any worthy apprehenſions of the deity can imagine him to be ſo eaſy, as to forgive men upon the leaſt word and intimation of their minds, and to have ſuch a fondneſs for offenders as would reflect upon the prudence of any magiſtrate and governor upon earth. GOD grant that I may ſincerely endeavour to live a holy and virtuous life, and may have the comfort of that when I come to die: and that I may never be ſo unwiſe as to venture all my hopes of a bleſſed eternity upon a death-bed repentance.

I will conclude all with thoſe excellent ſayings of the ſon of Sirach (Eccleſ. v. 6, 7. xvi. 11, 12. xviii. 21, 22. "Say not, GOD's mercy is great, and he "will be pacified for the multitude of my ſins. For "mercy and wrath is with him; he is mighty to for-"give, and to pour out diſpleaſure: and as his mer-"cy is great, ſo are his corrections alſo. Therefore "make no tarrying to turn to the LORD, and put "not off from day to day: for ſuddenly ſhall the "wrath of the LORD come forth, and in thy ſecuri-"ty thou ſhalt be deſtroyed. Humble thy ſelf before "thou be ſick, and in the time of ſins ſhew repentance. "Let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vows in due time, "and defer not till death to be juſtified.

SER-

SERMON XI.

The hazard of being ſaved in the church of Rome.

---

1 COR. iii. 15.

But he himſelf ſhall be ſaved, yet ſo as by fire.

THE context is thus. " According to the " grace of GOD which is given unto me, " as a wiſe maſter-builder, I have laid the " foundation, and another buildeth thereon: but let " every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. " For other foundation can no man lay, than that " which is laid, JESUS CHRIST. Now if any man " build upon this foundation, gold, ſilver, precious " ſtones, wood, hay, ſtubble, every man's work ſhall " be made manifeſt, for the day ſhall declare it; be- " cauſe it ſhall be revealed by fire, and the fire ſhall " try every man's work of what ſort it is. If any " man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, " he ſhall receive a reward. If any man's work ſhall " be burnt, he ſhall ſuffer loſs; but he himſelf ſhall " be ſaved, yet ſo as by fire. SERM. XI.

In theſe words the apoſtle ſpeaks of a ſort of perſons, who held indeed the foundation of Chriſtianity, but built upon it ſuch doctrines or practices as would not bear the trial; which he expreſſes to us by wood, hay and ſtubble, which are not proof againſt the fire.

Such

SERM. XI.

Such a perſon, the apoſtle tells us, hath brought himſelf into a very dangerous ſtate, though he would not deny the poſſibility of his ſalvation; "he himſelf "ſhall be ſaved, yet ſo as by fire."

That by fire here is not meant the fire of purgatory, as ſome pretend (who would be glad of any ſhadow of a text of ſcripture to countenance their own dreams) I ſhall neither trouble you nor my ſelf to manifeſt; ſince the particle of ſimilitude [ὡς] plainly ſhews that the apoſtle did not intend an eſcape out of the fire literally, but like to that which men make out of a houſe or town that is on fire. Eſpecially ſince very learned perſons of the church of Rome do acknowledge that purgatory cannot be concluded from this text, nay all that Eſtius contends for from this place is, that it cannot be concluded from hence that there is no purgatory; which we never pretended, but only that this text doth not prove it.

It is very well known that this is a proverbial phraſe uſed not only in ſcripture, but in prophane authors, to ſignify a narrow eſcape out of a great danger. He ſhall be ſaved, yet ſo as by fire, διὰ πυρὸς, "out "of the fire." Juſt as δι' ὕδατος is uſed 2 Pet. iii. 20. where the apoſtle ſpeaking of the eight perſons of Noah's family who eſcaped the flood, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος, they eſcaped "out of the water." So here this phraſe is to be rendred in the text, "he himſelf "ſhall eſcape, yet ſo as out of the fire." The like expreſſion you have, Amos iv. 11. "I have pluckt "them as a firebrand out of the fire." And Jude 23. "Others ſave with fear, plucking them out of "the fire." All which expreſſions ſignify the greatneſs of the danger and the difficulty of eſcaping it;

"as

" as one who when his houſe at midnight is ſet on SERM. XI.
" fire, and being ſuddenly waked leaps out of his
" bed, and runs naked out of the doors, taking no-
" thing that is within along with him, but imploy-
" ing his whole care to ſave his body from the flames,"
as St. Chryſoſtom upon another occaſion expreſſeth
it. And ſo the Roman orator (who, it is likely did Tully.
not think of purgatory) uſeth this phraſe ; *quo ex judicio, velut ex incendio, nudus effugit* ; from which
judgment or ſentence he eſcaped naked, as it were
out of a burning. And one of the Greek orators tells Ariſtides.
us, that " to ſave a man out of the fire, was a com-
" mon proverbial ſpeech.

From the words thus explained, the obſervation that naturally ariſeth is this, " that men may hold " all the fundamentals of Chriſtian religion, and yet " may ſuperadd other things whereby they may great- " ly endanger their ſalvation." What thoſe things were which ſome among the Corinthians built upon the foundation of Chriſtianity, whereby they endangered their ſalvation, we may probably conjecture by what the apoſtle reproves in this epiſtle, as the tolerating of inceſtuous marriages, communicating in idol feaſts, &c. And eſpecially by the doctrine of the falſe apoſtles, who at that time did ſo much diſturb the peace of moſt Chriſtian churches, and who are ſo often and ſo ſeverely reflected upon in this epiſtle. And what their doctrine was, we have an account Acts xv. viz. that they impoſed upon the gentile Chriſtians circumciſion, and the obſervation of the Jewiſh law, teaching that " unleſs they were " circumciſed, and kept the law of Moſes, they could " not be ſaved." So that they did not only build

SERM. XI.

these doctrines upon Christianity, but they made them equal with the foundation, saying, that "unless "men believed and practised such things they could "not be saved.

In speaking to this observation, I shall reduce my discourse to these two heads.

1. I shall present to you some doctrines and practices which have been built upon the foundation of Christianity, to the great hazard and danger of mens salvation. And to be plain, I mean particularly the church of Rome.

2. I shall inquire, whether our granting a possibility of salvation (though with great hazard) to those in the communion of the Roman church, and their denying it to us, be a reasonable argument and encouragement to any man to betake himself to that church.

And there is the more reason to consider these things, when so many seducing spirits are so active and busy to pervert men from the truth; and when we see every day so many men and their religion so easily parted. For this reason these two considerations shall be the subject of the following discourse.

I. First. We will consider some doctrines and practices which the church of Rome hath built upon the foundation of Christianity, to the great hazard and danger of mens salvation. It is not denied by the most judicious protestants, but that the church of Rome do hold all the articles of the Christian faith which are necessary to salvation. But that which we charge upon them, as a just ground of our separation from them, is, the imposing of new doctrines and practices upon Christians as necessary to salvation, which

which were never taught by our SAVIOUR, or his apoſtles; and which are either directly contrary to the doctrine of Chriſtianity, or too apparently deſtructive of a good life. And I begin,

1. With their doctrines. And becauſe I have no mind to aggravate leſſer matters, I will ſingle out four or five points of doctrine, which they have added to the Chriſtian religion, and which were neither taught by our SAVIOUR and his apoſtles, nor owned in the firſt ages of Chriſtianity. And the

Firſt which I ſhall mention, and which being once admitted makes way for as many errors as they pleaſe to bring in, is their doctrine of infallibility. And this they are very ſtiff and peremptory in, though they are not agreed among themſelves where this infallibility is ſeated; whether in the pope alone, or a council alone, or in both together, or in the diffuſive body of Chriſtians. But they are ſure they have it, though they know not where it is.

And is this no prejudice againſt it? Can any man think that this privilege was at firſt conferred upon the church of Rome, and that Chriſtians in all ages did believe it, and had conſtant recourſe to it for determining their differences, and yet that that very church which hath enjoyed and uſed it ſo long ſhould now be at a loſs where to find it? Nothing could have fallen out more unluckily, than that there ſhould be ſuch differences among them about that which they pretend to be the only means of ending all differences.

There is not the leaſt intimation in ſcripture of this privilege conferred upon the Roman church, nor do the apoſtles, in all their epiſtles, ever ſo much as

SERM. XI.

give the leaſt direction to Chriſtians to appeal to the biſhop of Rome for a determination of the many differences which even in thoſe times happened among them. And it is ſtrange they ſhould be ſo ſilent in this matter, when there were ſo many occaſions to ſpeak of it, if our SAVIOUR had plainly appointed ſuch an infallible judge of controverſies for this very end to decide the differences that ſhould happen among Chriſtians. It is ſtrange that the ancient fathers in their diſputes with hereticks ſhould never appeal to this judge; nay, it is ſtrange they ſhould not conſtantly do it in all caſes, it being ſo ſhort and expedite a way for the ending of controverſies. And this very conſideration to a wiſe man is inſtead of a thouſand arguments to ſatisfy him that in thoſe times no ſuch thing was believed in the world.

Now this doctrine of infallibility, if it be not true, is of ſo much the more pernicious conſequence to Chriſtianity, becauſe the conceit of it does confirm them that think they have it in all their other errors; and gives them a pretence of aſſuming an authority to themſelves to impoſe their own fancies and miſtakes upon the whole Chriſtian world.

2. Their doctrine about repentance, which conſiſts in confeſſing their ſins to the prieſt; which if it be but accompanied with any degree of contrition does upon abſolution received from the prieſt put them into a ſtate of ſalvation, though they have lived the moſt lewd and debauched lives that can be imagined; than which nothing can be more plainly deſtructive of a good life. For if this be true, all the hazard that the moſt wicked man runs of his ſalvation is only the danger of ſo ſudden a death as gives him no

ſpace for confeſſion and abſolution. A caſe that happens ſo rarely, that any man that is ſtrongly addicted to his luſts will be content to venture his ſalvation upon this hazard; and all the arguments to a good life will be very inſignificant to a man that hath a mind to be wicked, when remiſſion of ſins may be had upon ſuch cheap terms.

3. The doctrine of purgatory; by which they mean an eſtate of temporary puniſhments after this life, from which men may be releaſed and tranſlated into heaven by the prayers of the living, and the ſacrifice of the maſs. That this doctrine was not known in the primitive church, nor can be proved from ſcripture, we have the free acknowledgment of as learned and eminent men as any of that church; which is to acknowledge that it is a ſuperſtructure upon the Chriſtian religion. And though in one ſenſe it be indeed a building of gold and ſilver upon the foundation of Chriſtianity, conſidering the vaſt revenues which this doctrine (and that of indulgences, which depends upon it) brings into that church; yet I doubt not, but in the apoſtle's ſenſe, it will be found to be hay and ſtubble. But how groundleſs ſoever it be, it is too gainful a doctrine to be eaſily parted withal.

4. The doctrine of tranſubſtantiation. A hard word, but I would to GOD that were the worſt of it; the thing is much more difficult. I have taken ſome pains to conſider other religions that have been in the world, and I muſt freely declare, that I never yet in any of them met with any article or propoſition, impoſed upon the belief of men, half ſo unreaſonable and hard to be believed as this is: and yet this in the

Romiſh

SERM. XI.

Romish church is esteemed one of the most principal articles of the Christian faith; though there is no more certain foundation for it in scripture, than for our SAVIOUR's being substantially changed into all those things which are said of him, as that he is a rock, a vine, a door, and a hundred other things.

But this is not all. This doctrine hath not only no certain foundation in scripture, but I have a far heavier charge against it, namely, that it undermines the very foundation of Christianity it self. And surely nothing ought to be admitted to be a part of the Christian doctrine which destroys the reason of our belief of the whole. And that this doctrine does so, will appear evidently, if we consider what was the main argument which the apostles used to convince the world of the truth of Christianity; and that was this; "that our blessed SAVIOUR, the author of this doc-"trine, wrought such and such miracles, and par-"ticularly that he rose again from the dead?" And this they proved because they were eye-witnesses of his miracles, and had seen him and conversed with him after he was risen from the dead. But what if their senses did deceive them in this matter? then it cannot be denied but that the main proof of Christianity falls to the ground.

Well! we will now suppose (as the church of Rome does) transubstantiation to have been one principal part of the Christian doctrine which the apostles preached. But if this doctrine be true, then all mens senses are deceived in a plain sensible matter, wherein it is as hard for them to be deceived as in any thing in the world: for two things can hardly be imagined more different, than a little bit of wafer and the whole body of a man. So

So that the apoſtles perſuading men to believe this doctrine perſuaded them not to truſt their ſenſes, and yet the argument which they uſed to perſuade them to this was built upon the direct contrary principle, that mens ſenſes are to be truſted. For if they be not, then notwithſtanding all the evidence the apoſtles offered for the reſurrection of our SAVIOUR he might not be riſen, and ſo the faith of Chriſtians was vain. So that they repreſent the apoſtles as abſurd as is poſſible, viz. going about to perſuade men out of their ſenſes by virtue of an argument, the whole ſtrength whereof depends upon the certainty of ſenſe.

And now the matter is brought to a fair iſſue; if the teſtimony of ſenſe be to be relied upon, then tranſubſtantiation is falſe; if it be not, then no man is ſure that Chriſtianity is true. For the utmoſt aſſurance that the apoſtles had of the truth of Chriſtianity was the teſtimony of their own ſenſes concerning our SAVIOUR's miracles, and this teſtimony every man hath againſt tranſubſtantiation. From whence it plainly follows, that no man (no not the apoſtles themſelves) had more reaſon to believe Chriſtianity to be true, than every man hath to believe tranſubſtantiation to be falſe. And we who did not ſee our SAVIOUR's miracles (as the apoſtles did) and have only a credible relation of them, but do ſee the ſacrament, have leſs evidence of the truth of Chriſtianity than of the falſhood of tranſubſtantiation.

But cannot GOD impoſe upon the ſenſes of men, and repreſent things to them otherwiſe than they are? yes, undoubtedly. And if he hath revealed that he doth this, are we not to believe him? moſt certainly. But then we ought to be aſſured that he hath made

ſuch

SERM. XI.

ſuch a revelation; which aſſurance no man can have, the certainty of ſenſe being taken away.

I ſhall preſs the buſineſs a little farther, ſuppoſing the ſcripture to be a divine revelation, and that theſe words (this is my body) if they be in ſcripture, muſt neceſſarily be taken in the ſtrict and literal ſenſe; I aſk now, what greater evidence any man has that theſe words (this is my body) are in the bible, than every man has that the bread is not changed in the ſacrament? Nay no man has ſo much; for we have only the evidence of one ſenſe that theſe words are in the bible, but that the bread is not changed we have the concurring teſtimony of ſeveral of our ſenſes. In a word, if this be once admitted that the ſenſes of all men are deceived in one of the moſt plain ſenſible matters that can be, there is no certain means left either to convey or prove a divine revelation to men; nor is there any way to confute the groſſeſt impoſtures in the world: for if the clear evidence of all men's ſenſes be not ſufficient for this purpoſe, let any man, if he can, find a better and more convincing argument.

5. I will inſtance but in one doctrine more; and that ſhall be, their doctrine of depoſing kings in caſe of hereſy, and abſolving their ſubjects from their allegiance to them. And this is not a meer ſpeculative doctrine, but hath been put in practice many a time by the biſhops of Rome, as every one knows that is verſed in hiſtory. For the troubles and confuſions which were occaſioned by this very thing make up a good part of the hiſtory of ſeveral ages.

I hope no body expects that I ſhould take the pains to ſhew that this was not the doctrine of our SAVIOUR and

and his apoſtles, nor of the primitive Chriſtians. The papiſts are many of them ſo far from pretending this, that in ſome times and places, when it is not ſeaſonable and for their purpoſe, we have much ado to perſuade them that ever it was their doctrine. But if tranſubſtantiation be their doctrine, this is; for they came both out of the ſame forge, I mean the council of Lateran under pope Innocent the third. And if (as they tell us) tranſubſtantiation was then eſtabliſhed, ſo was this. And indeed one would think they were twins and brought forth at the ſame time, they are ſo like one another, both of them ſo monſtrouſly unreaſonable. SERM. XI.

II. I come now in the ſecond place to conſider ſome practices of the church of Rome, which I am afraid will prove as bad as her doctrines. I ſhall inſtance in theſe five.

1. Their celebrating of their divine ſervice in an unknown tongue. And that not only contrary to the practice of the primitive church, and to the great end and deſign of religious worſhip, which is the edification of thoſe who are concerned in it, (and it is hard to imagine how men can be edified by what they do not underſtand) but likewiſe in direct contradiction to St. Paul, who hath no leſs than a whole chapter wherein he confutes this practice as fully, and condemns it as plainly as any thing is condemned in the whole bible. And they that can have the face to maintain that this practice was not condemned by St. Paul, or that it was allowed and uſed in the firſt ages of Chriſtianity, need not be aſhamed to ſet up for the defence of any paradox in the world.

2. The communion in one kind. And that notwithstanding that even by their own acknowledgment our SAVIOUR instituted it in both kinds, and the primitive church administred it in both kinds. This I must acknowledge is no addition to Christianity, but a sacrilegious taking away of an essential part of the sacrament. For the cup is as essential a part of the institution as the bread; and they might as well, and by the same authority, take away the one as the other, and both as well as either.

3. Their worshipping of images. Which practice (notwithstanding all their distinctions about it, which are no other but what the heathens used in the same case) is as point blank against the second commandment, as a deliberate and malicious killing of a man is against the sixth. But if the case be so plain, a man would think that at least the teachers and guides of that church should be sensible of it. Why, they are so, and afraid the people should be so too, and therefore in their ordinary catechisms and manuals of devotion they leave out the second commandment, and divide the tenth into two to make up the number; lest if the common people should know it their consciences should start at the doing of a thing so directly contrary to the plain command of GOD.

4. The worshipping of the bread and wine in the eucharist, out of a false and groundless persuasion, that they are substantially changed into the body and blood of CHRIST. Which if it be not true (and it hath good fortune if it be, for certainly it is one of the most incredible things in the whole world) then by the confession of several of their own learned writers, they are guilty of gross idolatry.

5. The

5. The worſhip and invocation of ſaints and angels; and particularly of the virgin Mary, which hath now for ſome ages been a principal part of their religion. Now a man may juſtly wonder that ſo conſiderable a part of religion, as they make this to be, ſhould have no manner of foundation in the ſcripture. Does our SAVIOUR any where ſpeak one word concerning the worſhipping of her? Nay, does he not take all occaſions to reſtrain all extravagant apprehenſions and imaginations concerning honour due to her, as foreſeeing the degeneracy of the church in this thing? When he was told that his mother and brethren were without; "who (ſays he) are my mother and my bre-"thren? He that doth the will of my father, the ſame "is my mother, and my ſiſter, and brother." And when the woman brake forth into that rapture concerning the bleſſed mother of our LORD, "bleſſed is "the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave "thee ſuck!" our SAVIOUR diverts to another thing, "yea rather, bleſſed are they that hear the "word of GOD and keep it." Does either our SAVIOUR or his apoſtles, in all their particular precepts and directions concerning prayer and the manner of it, and by whom we are to addreſs our ſelves to GOD, give the leaſt intimation of praying to the virgin Mary, or making uſe of her mediation? And can any man believe, that if this had been the practice of the church from the beginning, our SAVIOUR and his apoſtles would have been ſo ſilent about ſo conſiderable a part of religion; inſomuch that in all the epiſtles of the apoſtles I do not remember that her name is ſo much as once mentioned? And yet the worſhip of her is at this day in the church of Rome,

SERM. XI.

SERM. XI.

and hath been so for several ages, a main part of their publick worship, yea and of their private devotions too; in which it is usual with them to say ten ave maries for one pater noster; that is, for one prayer they make to almighty GOD, they make ten addresses to the blessed virgin; for that is the proportion observed in their rosaries. He that considers this, and had never seen the bible, would have been apt to think that there had been more said concerning her in scripture, than either concerning GOD, or our blessed SAVIOUR; and that the new testament were full from one end to the other of precepts and exhortations to the worshipping of her; and yet when all is done, I challenge any man to shew me so much as one sentence in the whole bible that sounds that way. And there is as little in the Christian writers of the first three hundred years. The truth is, this practice began to creep in among some superstitious people about the middle of the fourth century: and I remember particularly, that Epiphanius who lived about that time calls it the heresy of the women.

And thus I have given you some instances of several doctrines and practices, which the church of Rome have built upon the foundation of Christianity. Much more might have been said of them, but from what hath been said any man may easily discern, how dangerous they are to the salvation of men.

I proceed now, in the second place,

II. To consider, whether our granting a possibility of salvation, though with great hazard, to those in the communion of the Roman church, and their denying it to us, be a sufficient argument and encouragement to any man to quit our church and go to theirs,

theirs. And there is the more need to consider this, becaufe this is the great popular argument wherewith the emiffaries and agents of that church are wont to affault our people. " Your church (fay they) grants " that a papift may be faved; ours denies that a pro- " teftant can be faved: therefore it is fafeft to be of " our church, in which falvation by the acknowledg- " ment of both fides is poffible.

For anfwer to this I fhall endeavour to fhew, that this is fo far from being a good argument that it is fo intolerably weak and fophiftical, that any confiderate man ought to be afhamed to be catched by it. For either it is good of it felf and fufficient to perfuade a man to relinquifh our church, and to pafs over to theirs, without entring into the merits of the caufe on either fide, and without comparing the doctrines and practices of both the churches together, or it is not. If it be not fufficient of it felf to perfuade a man to leave our church, without comparing the doctrines on both fides, then it is to no purpofe, and there is nothing got by it. For if upon examination and comparing of doctrines the one appear to be true and the other falfe, this alone is a fufficient inducement to any man to cleave to that church where the true doctrine is found; and then there is no need of this argument.

If it be faid that this argument is good in it felf without the examination of the doctrines of both churches; this feems a very ftrange thing for any man to affirm, " that it is reafon enough to a man to be " of any church, whatever her doctrines and prac- " tices be, if fhe do but damn thofe that differ from " her, and if the church that differs from her do but

" allow

SERM. XI.

"allow a possibility of salvation in her communion."

But they who use this argument, pretend that it is sufficient of it self; and therefore I shall apply my self to shew, as briefly and plainly as I can, the miserable weakness and insufficiency of it to satisfy any man's conscience or prudence to change his religion. And to this end I shall,

1. Shew the weakness of the principle upon which this argument relies.

2. Give some parallel instances by which it will clearly appear that it concludes false.

3. I shall take notice of some gross absurdities that follow from it.

4. Shew how unfit it is to work upon those to whom it is propounded. And

5. How improper it is to be urged by those that make use of it.

I. I shall shew the weakness of the principle upon which this argument relies; and that is this, "that "whatever different parties in religion agree in, is "safest to be chosen." The true consequence of which principle, if it be driven to the head, is to persuade men to forsake Christianity, and to make them take up in the principles of natural religion, for in these all religions do agree. For if this principle be true, and signify any thing, it is dangerous to imbrace any thing wherein the several parties in religion differ; because that only is safe and prudent to be chosen wherein all agree. So that this argument, if the foundation of it be good, will persuade further than those who make use of it desire it should do; for it will not only make men forsake the protestant religion, but popery too; and which is much more considerable, Christianity it self.

II. I will

II. I will give some parallel instances by which it will clearly be seen that this argument concludes false. The Donatists denied the baptism of the catholicks to be good, but the catholicks acknowledged the baptism of the Donatists to be valid. So that both sides were agreed that the baptism of the Donatists was good, therefore the safest way for St. Austin and other catholicks (according to this argument) was to be baptized again by the Donatists, because by the acknowledgment of both sides baptism among them was valid.

But to come nearer to the church of Rome. Several in that church hold "the personal infallibility "of the pope and the lawfulness of deposing and "killing kings for heresy" to be *de fide*, that is, necessary articles of faith, and consequently, that whoever does not believe them cannot be saved. But a great many papists, though they believe these things to be no matters of faith, yet they think those that hold them may be saved, and they are generally very favourable towards them. But now, according to this argument, they ought all to be of their opinion in these points, because both sides are agreed that they that hold them may be saved; but one side positively says that men cannot be saved if they do not hold them.

But my text furnishes me with as good an instance to this purpose as can be desired. St. Paul here in the text acknowledgeth the possibility of the salvation of those "who built hay and stubble upon the foun-"dation of Christianity; that they might be saved," though with great difficulty, and as it were out of the fire. But now among those builders with hay and stubble there were those who denied the possibility of

St.

SERM. XI.

St. Paul's salvation, and of those who were of his mind. We are told of some who built the Jewish ceremonies and observances upon the foundation of Christianity, and said that unless men were circumcised and kept the law of Moses they could not be saved. So that by this argument St. Paul and his followers ought to have gone over to those judaizing Christians, because it was acknowledged on both sides that they might be saved. But these judaizing Christians were as uncharitable to St. Paul and other Christians as the church of Rome is now to us, for they said positively that they could not be saved. But can any man think that St. Paul would have been moved by this argument, to leave a safe and certain way of salvation for that which was only possible, and that with great difficulty and hazard? The argument you see is the very same, and yet it concludes the wrong way; which plainly shews that it is a contingent argument, and concludes uncertainly and by chance, and therefore no man ought to be moved by it.

III. I shall take notice of some gross absurdities that follow from it. I shall mention but these two.

1. According to this principle it is always safest to be on the uncharitable side. And yet uncharitableness is as bad an evidence, either of a true Christian, or a true church, as a man would wish. Charity is one of the most essential marks of Christianity, and what the apostle saith of particular Christians is as true of whole Churches, "that though they have all "faith, yet if they have not charity they are nothing."

I grant that no charity teacheth men to see others damned, and not to tell them the danger of their con-

dition. But it is to be considered that the damning of men is a very hard thing, and therefore whenever we do it the case must be wonderfully plain. And is it so in this matter? They of the church of Rome cannot deny but that we imbrace all the doctrines of our SAVIOUR, contained in the apostles creed and determined by the four first general councils: and yet they will not allow this and a good life to put us within a possibility of salvation, because we will not submit to all the innovations they would impose upon us. And yet I think there is scarce any doctrine or practice in difference between them and us, which some or other of their most learned writers have not acknowledged either not to be sufficiently contained in scripture, or not to have been held and practised by the primitive church; so that nothing can excuse their uncharitableness towards us. And they pay dear for the little advantage they get by this argument, for they do what in them lies to make themselves no Christians, that they may prove themselves the truer and more Christian church; a medium which we do not desire to make use of. SERM. XI.

2. If this argument were good, then by this trick a man may bring over all the world to agree with him in an error which another does not account damnable, whatever it be, provided he do but damn all those that do not hold it; and there wants nothing but confidence and uncharitableness to do this. But is there any sense, that another man's boldness and want of charity should be an argument to move me to be of his opinion? I cannot illustrate this better, than by the difference between a skilful physician and a mountebank. A learned and a skilful physi-

an is modeſt, and ſpeaks juſtly of things: he ſays, that ſuch a method of cure which he hath directed is ſafe, and withal, that that which the mountebank preſcribes may poſſibly do the work, but there is great hazard and danger in it: but the mountebank, who never talks of any thing leſs than infallible cures, (and always the more mountebank the ſtronger pretence to infallibility) he is poſitive that that method which the phyſician preſcribes will deſtroy the patient, but his receipt is infallible and never fails. Is there any reaſon in this caſe, that this man ſhould carry it meerly by his confidence? And yet if this argument be good, the ſafeſt way is to reject the phyſician's advice and to ſtick to the mountebank's. For both ſides are agreed, that there is a poſſibility of cure in the mountebank's method, but not in the phyſician's; and ſo the whole force of the argument lies in the confidence of an ignorant man.

IV. This argument is very unfit to work upon thoſe to whom it is propounded: for either they believe we ſay true in this, or not. If they think we do not, they have no reaſon to be moved by what we ſay. If they think we do, why do they not take in all that we ſay in this matter? Namely, that though it be poſſible for ſome in the communion of the Roman church to be ſaved, yet it is very hazardous; and that they are in a ſafe condition already in our church. And why then ſhould a bare poſſibility, accompanied with infinite and apparent hazard, be an argument to any man to run into that danger?

Laſtly, this argument is very improper to be urged by thoſe who make uſe of it. Half of the ſtrength of it lies in this, that we proteſtants acknowledge that

it

it is poſſible a papiſt may be ſaved. But why ſhould they lay any ſtreſs upon this? What matter is it what we hereticks ſay, who are ſo damnably miſtaken in all others things? Methinks, if there were no other reaſon, yet becauſe we ſay it, it ſhould ſeem to them to be unlikely to be true. But I perceive when it ſerves for their purpoſe we have ſome little credit and authority among them. SERM. XI.

By this time I hope every one is in ſome meaſure ſatisfied of the weakneſs of this argument, which is ſo tranſparent that no wiſe man can honeſtly uſe it, and he muſt have a very odd underſtanding that can be cheated by it. The truth is, it is a caſual and contingent argument, and ſometimes it concludes right, and oftener wrong; and therefore no prudent man can be moved by it, except only in one caſe, when all things are ſo equal on both ſides that there is nothing elſe in the whole world to determine him; which ſurely can never happen in matters of religion, neceſſary to be believed. No man is ſo weak, as not to conſider in the change of his religion the merits of the cauſe it ſelf; as not to examine the doctrines and practices of the churches on both ſides; as not to take notice of the confidence and charity of both parties, together with all other things which ought to move a conſcientious and a prudent man: and if upon enquiry there appear to be a clear advantage on either ſide, then this argument is needleſs and comes too late, becauſe the work is already done without it.

Beſides, that the great hazard of ſalvation in the Roman church (which we declare upon account of the doctrines and practices which I have mentioned) ought to deter any man much more from that

SERM. XI.

religion, than the acknowledged possibility of salvation in it ought to encourage any man to the embracing of it; never did any Christian church build so much hay and stubble upon the foundation of Christianity, and therefore "those that are saved in it "must be saved," as it were "out of the fire." And though purgatory be not meant in the text, yet it is a doctrine very well suited to their manner of building; for there is need of an *ignis purgatorius*, of a fire to try their work what it is, and to burn up their hay and stubble. And I have so much charity (and I desire always to have it) as to hope, that a great many among them who live piously, and have been almost inevitably detained in that church by the prejudice of education and an invincible ignorance, will upon a general repentance find mercy with God; and "though "their works suffer loss and be burnt, yet themselves "may escape, as out of the fire." But as for those who had the opportunities of coming to the knowledge of the truth, if they continue in the errors of that church, or apostatize from the truth, I think their condition so far from being safe that there must be extraordinary favourable circumstances in their case to give a man hopes of their salvation.

I have now done with the two things I propounded to speak to. And I am sorry that the necessary defence of our religion, against the restless importunities and attempts of our adversaries upon all sorts of persons, hath engaged me to spend so much time in matters of dispute, which I had much rather have employed in another way. Many of you can be my witnesses that I have constantly made it my business, in this great presence and assembly to plead against

againſt the impieties and wickedneſs of men, and have endeavoured by the beſt arguments I could think of to gain men over to a firm belief and ſerious practice of the main things of religion. And, I do aſſure you, I had much rather perſuade any one to be a good man, than to be of any party or denomination of Chriſtians whatſoever. For I doubt not but the belief of the ancient creed, provided we entertain nothing that is deſtructive of it, "together with a good "life, will certainly ſave a man;" and without this no man can have reaſonable hopes of ſalvation, no not in an infallible church, if there were any ſuch to be found in the world. SERM. XI.

I have been, according to my opportunities, not a negligent obſerver of the genius and humour of the ſeveral ſects and profeſſions in religion. And upon the whole matter, I do in my conſcience believe the church of England to be the beſt conſtituted church this day in the world; and that, as to the main, the doctrine, and government, and worſhip of it, are excellently framed to make men ſoberly religious: ſecuring men on the one hand, from the wild freaks of enthuſiaſm; and on the other, from the groſs follies of ſuperſtition. And our church hath this peculiar advantage above ſeveral profeſſions that we know in the world, that it acknowledgeth a due and juſt ſubordination to the civil authority, and hath always been untainted in it's loyalty.

And now ſhall every trifling conſideration be ſufficient to move a man to relinquiſh ſuch a church? There is no greater diſparagement to a man's underſtanding, no greater argument of a light and ungenerous mind, than raſhly to change one's religion.

Religion

SERM. XI.

Religion is our greateſt concernment of all other, and it is not every little argument, no nor a great noiſe about infallibility, nothing but very plain and convincing evidence, that ſhould ſway a man in this caſe. But they are utterly inexcuſable who make a change of ſuch concernment upon the inſinuations of one ſide only, without ever hearing what can be ſaid for the church they were baptized and brought up in before they leave it. They that can yield thus eaſily to the impreſſions of every one that hath a deſign and intereſt to make proſelytes may at this rate of diſcretion change their religion twice a day, and inſtead of morning and evening prayer, they may have a morning and evening religion.

Therefore for GOD's ſake, and for our own ſouls ſake, and for the ſake of our reputation, let us conſider and ſhew our ſelves men; let us not ſuffer our ſelves to be ſhaken and carried away with every wind. Let us not run our ſelves into danger when we may be ſafe. Let us ſtick to the foundation of religion, the articles of our common belief, and build upon them gold, and ſilver, and precious ſtones, I mean, the virtues and actions of a good life; and if we would do this, we ſhould not be apt to ſet ſuch a value upon hay and ſtubble. If we would ſincerely endeavour to live holy and virtuous lives, we ſhould not need to caſt about for a religion which may furniſh us with eaſy and indirect ways to get to heaven.

I will conclude all with the apoſtle's exhortation, "wherefore my beloved brethren be ye ſtedfaſt and "unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the "LORD.

"Now

" Now the GOD of peace which brought again
" from the dead our LORD JESUS CHRIST, the great
" shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlast-
" ing covenant, make you perfect in every good
" work, to do his will; working in you that which
" is well pleasing in his sight, through JESUS CHRIST,
" to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XII.

Of the inward peace and pleasure which attends religion.

PSAL. cxix. 165.

Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.

IN these words there are two things contained, the description of a good man, and the reward of his goodness. SERM. XII.

1. The description of a good man, he is said to be one that loves the law of GOD, that is, that loves to meditate upon it, and to practise it.

2. The reward of his goodness; " great peace have
" they that love thy law. The word peace is many times used in scripture in a very large sense, so as to comprehend all kind of happiness: sometimes it signifies outward peace and quiet, in opposition to war

SERM. XII.

and contention; and sometimes inward peace and contentment in opposition to inward trouble and anguish. I understand the text chiefly in this last sense, not wholly excluding either of the other.

My design at present from these words is, to recommend religion to men from the consideration of that inward peace and pleasure which attends it. And surely nothing can be said more to the advantage of religion in the opinion of considerate men than this. For the aim of all philosophy, and the great search of wise men, hath been how to attain peace and tranquillity of mind. And if religion be able to give this, a greater commendation need not be given to religion.

But before I enter upon this argument I shall premise two things by way of caution:

First, that these kind of observations are not to be taken too strictly and rigorously, as if they never failed in any one instance. Aristotle observed long since, that moral and proverbial sayings are understood to be true generally and for the most part; and that is all the truth that is to be expected in them; as, when Solomon says, "train up a child in the "way wherein he shall go, and when he is old he "will not depart from it:" This is not to be so taken as if no child that is piously educated did ever miscarry afterwards, but that the good education of children is the best way to make good men, and commonly approved to be so by experience. So here, when it is said that "great peace have they that love GOD's law;" the meaning is, that religion hath generally this effect, though in some cases, and as to some persons, it may be accidentally hindred.

Secondly,

Secondly, when I ſay that religion gives peace and tranquillity to our minds, this is chiefly to be underſtood of a religious ſtate in which a man is well ſettled and confirmed, and not of our firſt entrance into it, for that is more or leſs troubleſom according as we make it. If we begin a religious courſe betimes, before we have contracted any great guilt, and before the habits of ſin be grown ſtrong in us, the work goes on eaſily without any great conflict or reſiſtance. But the caſe is otherwiſe when a man breaks off from a wicked life, and becomes religious from the direct contrary courſe in which he hath been long and deeply engaged. In this caſe no man is ſo unreaſonable as to deny, that there is a great deal of ſenſible trouble and difficulty in the making of this change; but when it is once made, peace and comfort will ſpring up by degrees, and daily encreaſe as we grow more confirmed and eſtabliſhed in a good courſe. SERM. XII.

Theſe two things being premiſed, I ſhall now endeavour to ſhew that religion gives a man the greateſt pleaſure and ſatisfaction of mind, and that there is no true peace, nor any comparable pleaſure to be had in a contrary courſe. And that from theſe two heads. From teſtimony of ſcripture; and from the nature of religion which is apt to produce peace and tranquillity of mind.

I. Firſt, from teſtimony of ſcripture. I ſhall ſelect ſome of thoſe texts which are more full and expreſs to this purpoſe, Job xxii. 21. ſpeaking of God, "acquaint thy ſelf now with him and be at peace." To acquaint our ſelves with God is a phraſe of the ſame importance with coming to God, and ſeeking of him, and many other like expreſſions in ſcripture

SERM. XII.

which signify nothing else but to become religious, Psal. xxxvii. 38. "mark the perfect man, and behold "the upright, for the end of that man is peace:" or, as these words are rendred according to the LXX. in our old translation, "keep innocency, take heed "to the thing that is right, for that shall bring thee "peace at the last." Prov. iii. 17. Where Solomon speaking of wisdom, which with him is but another name for religion, says, "her ways are ways of plea- "santness, and all her paths are peace." Isa. xxxii. 17. "the work of righteousness shall be peace, and "the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance "for ever." Mat. xi. 28, 29. "come unto me all "ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will "give you rest." Now to come to CHRIST is to become his disciples, to believe and practise his doctrine; for so our SAVIOUR explains himself in the next words, "take my yoke upon you, and learn "of me, and ye shall find rest for your souls." Rom. ii. 10. "glory, and honour and peace to every man "that worketh good."

And on the contrary the scripture represents the condition of a sinner to be full of trouble and disquiet. David though he was a very good man, yet when he had grievously offended GOD the anguish of his mind was such, as even to disorder and distemper his body, Psal. xxxviii. 2, 3, 4. "thine arrows stick fast in "me, and thy hand presseth me sore; there is no "soundness in my flesh because of thine anger, nei- "ther is there any rest in my bones because of my "sin; for mine iniquities are gone over mine head, "and as an heavy burthen they are too heavy for "me." Isa. lvii. 20, 21. "the wicked are like the troubled

" troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast SERM.
" up mire and dirt; there is no peace, saith my God, XII.
" to the wicked." And Isa. lix. 7, 8. " misery and
" destruction are in their paths, and the way of peace
" they know not; they have made themselves crook-
" ed paths, whosoever goeth therein shall not know
" peace." Rom. ii. 9. " tribulation and anguish" upon
" every soul of man that doth evil."

You see how full and express the scripture is in this matter. I come now in the

II. Second place, to give you a more particular account of this from the nature of religion, which is apt to produce peace and tranquillity of mind. And that I shall do in these three particulars.

1. Religion is apt to remove the chief causes of inward trouble and disquiet.

2. It furnishes us with all the true causes of peace and tranquillity of mind.

3. The reflection upon a religious course of life and all the actions of it, doth afterwards yield great pleasure and satisfaction.

First, religion is apt to remove the chief causes of inward trouble and disquiet. The chief causes of inward trouble and discontent are these two, doubting and anxiety of mind, and guilt of conscience. Now religion is apt to free us from both these.

1. From doubting and anxiety of mind. Irreligion and atheism makes a man full of doubts and jealousies whether he be in the right, and whether at last things will not prove quite otherwise than he hath rashly determined. For though a man endeavour never so much to settle himself in the principles of infidelity, and to persuade his mind that there is

no GOD, and consequently that there are no rewards to be hoped for, nor punishments to be feared in another life; yet he can never attain to a steady and unshaken persuasion of these things: and however he may please himself with witty reasons against the common belief of mankind, and smart repartees to their arguments, and bold and pleasant raillery about these matters; yet I dare say, no man ever sat down in a clear and full satisfaction concerning them. For when he hath done all that he can to reason himself out of religion, his conscience ever and anon recoils upon him, and his natural thoughts and apprehensions rise up against his reasonings, and all his wit and subtilty is confuted and born down by a secret and strong suspicion, which he can by no means get out of his mind, that things may be otherwise.

And the reason hereof is plain, because all this is an endeavour against nature and those vigorous instincts which GOD hath planted in the minds of men to the contrary. For whenever our minds are free and not violently hurried away by passion, nor blinded by prejudice, they do of themselves return to their first and most natural apprehension of things. And this is the reason why when the atheist falls into any great calamity, and is awakened to an impartial consideration of things by the apprehension of death and judgment, and despairs of enjoying any longer those pleasures for the sake of which he hath all this while rebelled against religion, his courage presently sinks, and all his arguments fail him, and his case is now too serious to admit of jesting, and at the bottom of his soul he doubts of all that which he asserted with so much confidence and set so good a face upon before, and

and can find no eaſe to his mind but in retreating from his former principles, nor no hopes of conſolation for himſelf but in acknowledging that GOD whom he hath denied, and imploring his mercy whom he hath affronted.

This is always the caſe of theſe perſons when they come to extremity, not to mention the infinite checks and rebukes which their own minds give them upon other occaſions; ſo that 'tis very ſeldom that theſe men have any tolerable enjoyment of themſelves, but are forced to run away from themſelves into company, and to ſtupify themſelves by intemperance, that they may not feel the fearful twitches and gripings of their own minds.

Whereas he who entertains the principles of religion, and therein follows his own natural apprehenſions and the general voice of mankind, and is not conſcious to himſelf that he knowingly and wilfully lives contrary to theſe principles, hath no anxiety in his mind about theſe things; being verily perſuaded they are true, and that he hath all the reaſon in the world to think ſo; and if they ſhould prove otherwiſe (which he hath no other cauſe to ſuſpect) yet he hath this ſatisfaction, that he hath taken the wiſeſt courſe and hath conſulted his own preſent peace and future ſecurity infinitely better than the atheiſt hath done, in caſe he ſhould prove to be miſtaken. For it is a fatal miſtake to think there is no GOD, if there be one; but a miſtake on the other hand hath no future bad conſequences depending upon it, nor indeed any great preſent inconvenience, religion only reſtraining a man from doing ſome things, from moſt of which it is good he ſhould be reſtrained however; ſo that

at

at the worst the religious man is only mistaken; but the atheist is miserable if he be mistaken; miserable beyond all imagination, and past all remedy.

2. Another, and indeed a principal cause of trouble and discontent to the minds of men is guilt. Now guilt is a consciousness to our selves that we have done amiss, and the very thought that we have done amiss is apt to lie very cross in our minds and to cause great anguish and confusion. Besides that Guilt is always attended with fear, which naturally springs up in the mind of man from a secret apprehension of the mischief and inconvenience that his sin will bring upon him, and of the vengeance that hangs over him from God, and will overtake him either in this world, or in the other.

And though the sinner, while he is in full health and prosperity, may make a shift to divert and shake off these fears; yet they frequently return upon him, and upon every little noise of danger, upon the apprehension of any calamity that comes near him, his guilty mind is presently jealous that it is making towards him and is particularly levelled against him. For he is sensible that there is a just power above him to whose indignation he is continually liable, and therefore he is always in fear of him, and how long soever he may have escaped punishment in this world he cannot but dread the vengeance of the other; and these thoughts are a continual disturbance to his mind and in the midst of laughter make his heart heavy, and the longer he continues in a wicked course the more he multiplies the grounds and causes of his fears.

But now religion frees a man from all this torment, either by preventing the cause of it, or directing to the

cure ; either by preſerving us from guilt, or clearing us of it in caſe we have contracted it. It preſerves us from guilt by keeping us innocent ; and in caſe we have offended, it clears us of it by leading us to repentance and the amendment of our lives ; which is the only way to recover the favour of God and the peace of our own conſciences, and to ſecure us againſt all apprehenſion of danger from the divine juſtice ; though not abſolutely from all fear of puniſhment in this world, yet from that which is the greateſt danger of all, the condemnation and torment of the world to come. And by this means a man's mind is ſettled in perfect peace, religion freeing him from thoſe tormenting fears of the divine diſpleaſure, which he can upon no other terms rid himſelf of ; whereas the ſinner is always ſowing the ſeeds of trouble in his own mind, and laying the foundation of continual diſcontent to himſelf. SERM. XII.

Secondly, as religion removes the chief grounds of trouble and diſquiet, ſo it miniſters to us all the true cauſes of peace and tranquillity of mind. Whoever lives according to the rules of religion lays theſe three great foundations of peace and comfort to himſelf.

1. He is ſatisfied that in being religious he doth that which is moſt reaſonable.

2. That he ſecures himſelf againſt the greateſt miſchiefs and dangers by making God his friend.

3. That upon the whole matter he does in all reſpects moſt effectually conſult and promote his own intereſt and happineſs.

1. He is ſatisfied that he does that which is moſt reaſonable. And it is no ſmall pleaſure to be juſtified to our ſelves, to be ſatisfied that we are what we ought

SERM. XII.

ought to be, and do what in reason we ought to do; that which best becomes us, and which according to the primitive intention of our being is most natural; for whatever is natural is pleasant. Now the practice of piety towards God, and of every other grace and virtue which religion teaches us, are things reasonable in themselves, and what God when he made us intended we should do. And a man is then pleased with himself and his own actions, when he doth what he is convinced he ought to do; and is then offended with himself, when he goes against the light of his own mind by neglecting his duty or doing contrary to it; for then his conscience checks him, and there is something within him that is uneasy and puts him into disorder. As when a man eats or drinks any thing that is unwholesom it offends his stomach, and puts his body into an unnatural and a restless state.

For every thing is then at rest and peace when it is in that state in which nature intended it to be, and being violently forced out of it, it is never quiet till it recover again. Now religion and the practice of it's virtues is the natural state of the soul, the condition to which God designed it. As God made man a reasonable creature, so all the acts of religion are reasonable and suitable to our nature: and our souls are then in health when we are what the laws of religion require us to be, and do what they command us to do. And as we find an unexpressible ease and pleasure when our body is in it's perfect state of health, and on the contrary every distemper causeth pain and uneasiness; so is it with the soul. When religion governs all our inclinations and actions, and the temper of our minds and the course of our lives is conformable

formable to the precepts of it, all is at peace. But when we are otherwiſe, and live in any vicious practice, how can there be peace; ſo long as we act unreaſonably, and do thoſe things whereby we neceſſarily create trouble and diſturbance to our ſelves? How can we hope to be at eaſe ſo long as we are in a ſick and diſeaſed condition? Till the corruption that is in us be wrought out, our ſpirits will be in a perpetual tumult and fermentation; and it is as impoſſible for us to enjoy the peace and ſerenity of our minds as it is for a ſick man to be at eaſe: the man may uſe what arts of diverſion he will, and change from one place and poſture to another: but ſtill he is reſtleſs, becauſe there is that within him which gives him pain and diſturbance, "there is no peace, ſaith my "GOD, to the wicked." Such men may diſſemble their condition, and put on the face and appearance of pleaſantneſs and contentment; but GOD, who ſees all the ſecrets of mens hearts, knows it is far otherwiſe with them, "there is no peace, ſaith my GOD, "to the wicked." SERM. XII.

2. Another ground of peace which the religious man hath is, that he hath made GOD his friend. Now friendſhip is peace and pleaſure both; it is mutual love, and that is a double pleaſure; and it is hard to ſay which is the greateſt, the pleaſure of loving GOD, or of knowing that he loves us. Now whoever ſincerely endeavours to pleaſe GOD may reſt perfectly aſſured that GOD hath no diſpleaſure againſt him; for "the righteous LORD loveth righteouſneſs, and "his countenance ſhall behold the upright;" that is, he will be favourable to ſuch perſons. As "he hates "the workers of inquity, ſo he takes pleaſure in "them

SERM. XII.

" them that fear him, in ſuch as keep his covenant,
" and remember his commandments to do them.

And being aſſured of his favour, we are ſecured againſt the greateſt dangers and the greateſt fears; and may ſay with David, " return then unto thy " reſt, O my ſoul, for the LORD hath dealt bounti- " fully with thee: the LORD is my light and my ſal- " vation, whom ſhall I fear? the LORD is the ſtrength " of my life, of whom ſhall I be afraid?" What can reaſonably trouble or diſcontent that man who hath made his peace with GOD and is reſtored to his favour, who is the beſt and moſt powerful friend, and can be the foreſt and moſt dangerous enemy in the whole world?

3. By being religious we do moſt effectually conſult our own intereſt and happineſs. A great part of religion conſiſts in moderating our appetites and paſſions, and this naturally tends to the compoſure of our minds. He that lives piouſly and virtuouſly acts according to reaſon, and in ſo doing maintains the preſent peace of his own mind; and not only ſo, but he lays the foundation of his future happineſs to all eternity. For religion gives a man the hopes of eternal life: and all pleaſure does not conſiſt in preſent enjoyment; there is a mighty pleaſure alſo, in the firm belief and expectation of a future good; and if it be a great and laſting good, it will ſupport a man under a great many preſent evils. If religion be certainly the way to avoid the greateſt evils, and to bring us to happineſs at laſt, we may contentedly bear a great many afflictions for it's ſake. For though all ſuffering be grievous, yet it is pleaſant to eſcape great dangers, and to come to the poſſeſſion of a mighty good, though it be with great difficulty and

inconvenience to our ſelves. And when we come to heaven (if ever we be ſo happy as to get thither) it will be a new and a greater pleaſure to us to remember the pains and troubles whereby we were ſaved and made happy.

So that all theſe put together are a firm foundation of peace and comfort to a good man. There is a great ſatisfaction in the very doing of our duty and acting reaſonably, though there may happen to be ſome preſent trouble and inconvenience in it. But when we do not only ſatisfy our ſelves in ſo doing, but likewiſe pleaſe him whoſe favour is better than life, and whoſe frowns are more terrible than death; when in doing our duty we directly promote our own happineſs, and in ſerving God do moſt effectually ſerve our own intereſt, what can be imagined to miniſter more peace and pleaſure to the mind of man?

This is the ſecond thing. Religion furniſhes us with all the true cauſes of peace and tranquillity of mind.

Thirdly, the reflection upon a religious and virtuous courſe of life doth afterwards yield a mighty pleaſure and ſatisfaction. And what can commend religion more to us, than that the remembrance of any pious and virtuous action gives us ſo much contentment and delight? So that whatever difficulty and reluctancy we may find in the doing of it, to be ſure there is peace and ſatisfaction in the looking back upon it. No man ever reflected upon himſelf with regret for having done his duty to God or man; for having lived ſoberly, or righteouſly, or godly in this preſent world. Nay, on the contrary, the conſcience of any duty faithfully diſcharged, the memory

SERM. XII.

of any good we have done, does refresh the soul with a strange kind of pleasure and joy, "our rejoicing is "this (saith St. Paul) the testimony of our consci- "ences, that in all simplicity and godly sincerity we "have had our conversation in the world.

But on the other side, the course of a vicious life, all acts of impiety to GOD, of malice and injustice to men, of intemperance and excess in reference to our selves, do certainly leave a sting behind them. And whatever pleasure there may be in the present act of them, the memory of them is so tormenting, that men are glad to use all the arts of diversion to fence off the thoughts of them. One of the greatest troubles in the world to a bad man is to look into himself, and to remember how he hath lived. I appeal to the consciences of men whether this be not true.

And is not here now a mighty difference between these two courses of life; that when we do any thing that is good, if there be any trouble in it it is soon over, but the pleasure of it is perpetual: when we do a wicked action the pleasure of it is short and transient, but the trouble and sting of it remains for ever? The reflection upon the good we have done gives a lasting satisfaction to our minds, but the remembrance of any evil committed by us leaves a perpetual discontent.

And, which is yet more considerable, a religious and virtuous course of life does then yield most peace and comfort when we most stand in need of it; in times of affliction, and at the hour of death. When a man falls into any great calamity there is no comfort in the world like to that of a good conscience; this makes all calm and serene within when there is nothing

nothing but clouds and darkneſs about him. So David obſerves of the good man, Pſa. cxii. 4. "unto "the upright there ariſeth light in darkneſs." All the pious and virtuous actions that we do are ſo many ſeeds of peace and comfort, ſown in our conſciences, which will ſpring up and flouriſh moſt in times of outward trouble and diſtreſs, "light is ſown for the "righteous, and gladneſs for the upright in heart." And at the hour of death; "the righteous hath hopes "in his death," ſaith Solomon. And what a ſeaſonable refreſhment is it to the mind of man when the pangs of death are ready to take hold of him, and he is juſt ſtepping into the other world, to be able to look back with ſatisfaction upon a religious and well-ſpent life? Then, if ever, the comforts of a good man do overflow, and a kind of heaven ſprings up in his mind, and he rejoiceth in the hopes of the glory of GOD. And that is a true and ſolid comfort indeed, which will ſtand by us in the day of adverſity, and ſtick cloſe to us when we have moſt need of it.

"But with the ungodly it is not ſo:" his guilt lies in wait for him, eſpecially againſt ſuch times; and is never more fierce and raging than in the day of diſtreſs; ſo that according as his troubles without are multiplied, ſo are his ſtings within. And ſurely affliction is then grievous indeed, when it falls upon a galled and uneaſy mind. Were it not for this, outward afflictions might be tolerable; the "ſpirit of a "man might bear his infirmities, but a wounded "ſpirit who can bear?" But eſpecially at the hour of death. How does the guilt of his wicked life then ſtare him in the face? What ſtorms and tempeſts are raiſed in his ſoul? which make it like the troubled

bled sea when it cannot rest. When eternity, that fearful and amazing sight, presents it's self to his mind, and he feels himself sinking into the regions of darkness, and is every moment in a fearful expectation of meeting with the just reward of his deeds; with what regret does he then remember the sins of his life? and how full of rage and indignation is he against himself for having neglected to know, when he had so many opportunities of knowing them, the things that belong to his peace; and which, because he hath neglected them, are now and likely to be for ever hid from his eyes?

And if this be the true case of the righteous and wicked man I need not multiply words, but may leave it to any man's thoughts in which of these conditions he would be. And surely the difference between them is so very plain, that there can be no difficulty in the choice.

But now though this discourse be very true, yet for the full clearing of this matter, it will be but fair to consider what may be said on the other side; and the rather, because there are several objections which seem to be countenanced from experience, which is enough to overthrow the most plausible speculation. As,

1. That wicked men seem to have a great deal of pleasure and contentment in their vices.

2. That religion imposeth many harsh and grievous things, which seem to be inconsistent with that pleasure and satisfaction I have spoken of.

3. That those who are religious are many times very disconsolate and full of trouble.

To the first, I deny not that wicked men have some pleasure in their vices; but when all things are rightly

rightly computed, and juſt abatements made, it will amount to very little. For it is the loweſt and meaneſt kind of pleaſure, it is chiefly the pleaſure of our bodies and our ſenſes, of our worſt part; the pleaſure of the beaſt, and not of the man; that which leaſt becomes us, and which we were leaſt of all made for. Thoſe ſenſual pleaſures which are lawful are much inferior to the leaſt ſatisfaction of the mind, and when they are unlawful they are always inconſiſtent with it. And what is a man profited, if to gain a little ſenſual pleaſure he loſe the peace of his ſoul? Can we find in our hearts to call that pleaſure which robs us of a far greater and higher ſatisfaction than it brings? The delights of ſenſe are ſo far from being the chief pleaſure which GOD deſigned us, that on the contrary he intended we ſhould take our chief pleaſure in the reſtraining and moderating of our ſenſual appetites and deſires, and in keeping them within the bounds of reaſon and religion. SERM. XII.

And then, it is not a laſting pleaſure. Thoſe fits of mirth which wicked men have, how ſoon are they over? Like a ſudden blaze which after a little flaſh and noiſe is preſently gone. It is the compariſon of a very great and experienced man in theſe matters; "like the crackling of thorns under a pot (ſaith So-"lomon) ſo is the laughter of the fool," that is, the mirth of the wicked man; it may be loud, but it laſts not.

But, which is moſt conſiderable of all, the pleaſures of ſin bear no proportion to that long and black train of miſeries and inconveniencies which they draw after them. Many times poverty and reproach, pains and diſeaſes upon our bodies, "indignation and wrath,

"tribulation

SERM. XII.

" tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man " that doth evil." So that if these pleasures were greater than they are, a man had better be without them than purchase them at such dear rates.

To the second. That religion imposeth many harsh and grievous things, which seem to be inconsistent with that pleasure and satisfaction I have spoken of: as, the bearing of persecution, repentance and mortification, fasting and abstinence, and many other rigours and severities. As to persecution; this discourse doth not pretend that religion exempts men from outward troubles, but that, when they happen, it supports men under them better than any thing else. As for repentance and mortification; this chiefly concerns our first entrance into religion after a wicked life, which I acknowledged in the beginning of this discourse to be very grievous; but this does not hinder but that though religion may be troublesom at first to some persons whose former sins and crimes have made it so, it may be pleasant afterwards when we are accustomed to it. And whatever the trouble of repentance be, it is unavoidable, unless we resolve to be miserable; for " except we repent we must perish." Now there is always a rational satisfaction in submitting to a less inconvenience to remedy and prevent a greater. As for fasting and abstinence, which is many times very helpful and subservient to the ends of religion, there is no such extraordinary trouble in it, if it be discreetly managed, as is worth the speaking of. And as for other rigours and severities which some pretend religion does impose, I have only this to say, that if men will play the fool, and make religion more troublesom than GOD hath made it, I

cannot

cannot help that: and, that this is a falſe repreſenta- SERM. XII.
tion of religion which ſome in the world have made, as if it did chiefly conſiſt not in pleaſing GOD, but in diſpleaſing and tormenting our ſelves. This is not to paint religion like her ſelf, but rather like one of the furies, with nothing but whips and ſnakes about her.

To the third, That thoſe who are religious are many times very diſconſolate and full of trouble. This, I confeſs, is a great objection indeed, if religion were the cauſe of this trouble; but there are other plain cauſes of it, to which religion rightly underſtood is not acceſſory. As, falſe and miſtaken principles in religion; the imperfection of our religion and obedience to GOD; and a melancholy temper and diſpoſition. Falſe and miſtaken principles in religion. As this for one; that GOD does not ſincerely deſire the ſalvation of men, but hath from all eternity effectually barr'd the greateſt part of mankind from all poſſibility of attaining that happineſs which he offers to them; and every one hath cauſe to fear that he may be in that number. This were a melancholy conſideration indeed, if it were true; but there is no ground either from reaſon or ſcripture to entertain any ſuch thought of GOD. Our deſtruction is of our ſelves; and no man ſhall be ruined by any decree of GOD who does not ruin himſelf by his own fault.

Or elſe, the imperfection of our religion and obedience to GOD. Some perhaps are very devout in ſerving GOD, but not ſo kind and charitable, ſo juſt and honeſt in their dealings with men. No wonder if ſuch perſons be diſquieted; the natural conſciences of men being not more apt to diſquiet them for any thing, than for the neglect of thoſe moral duties,

SERM. XII.

which natural light teacheth them. Peace of conscience is the effect of an impartial and universal obedience to the laws of GOD; and I hope no man will blame religion for that which plainly proceeds from the want of religion.

Or lastly, a melancholy temper and disposition; which is not from religion, but from our nature and constitution; and therefore religion ought not to be charged with it.

And thus I have endeavoured, as briefly and plainly as I could, to represent to you what peace and pleasure, what comfort and satisfaction, religion rightly understood and sincerely practised is apt to bring to the minds of men. And I do not know by what sort of argument religion can be more effectually recommended to wise and considerate men. For in persuading men to be religious I do not go about to rob them of any true pleasure and contentment, but to direct them to the very best, nay indeed the only way of attaining and securing it.

I speak this in great pity and compassion to those who make it their great design to please themselves, but do grievously mistake the way to it. The direct way is that which I have set before you, a holy and virtuous life, "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, "and to live soberly and righteously and godly in "this present world." "A good man (saith Solomon) "is satisfied from himself:" he hath the pleasure of being wise, and acting reasonably; the pleasure of being justified to himself in what he doth, and of being acquitted by the sentence of his own mind. There is a great pleasure in being innocent, because that prevents guilt and trouble; it is pleasant to be virtuous

ous and good, becauſe that is to excel many others; and it is pleaſant to grow better, becauſe that is to excel our ſelves: nay it is pleaſant even to mortify and ſubdue our luſts, becauſe that is victory: it is pleaſant to command our appetites and paſſions, and to keep them in due order, within the bounds of reaſon and religion; becauſe this is a kind of empire, this is to govern. It is naturally pleaſant to rule and have power over others, but he is the great and the abſolute prince who commands himſelf. This is "the kingdom of GOD within us," a dominion infinitely to be preferred before all "the kingdoms of "this world, and the glory of them." It is the "kingdom of GOD" deſcribed by the apoſtle, which conſiſts "in righteouſneſs and peace, and joy in the Ho- "ly Ghoſt." In a word, the pleaſure of being good and of doing good is the chief happineſs of GOD himſelf. SERM. XII.

But now the wicked man deprives himſelf of all this pleaſure, and creates perpetual diſcontent to his own mind. O the torments of a guilty conſcience! which the ſinner feels more or leſs all his life long. But, alas! thou doſt not yet know the worſt of it, no not in this world. What wilt thou do when thou comeſt to die? What comfort wilt thou then be able to give thy ſelf? or what comfort can any one elſe give thee, when thy conſcience is miſerably rent and torn by thoſe waking furies which will then rage in thy breaſt, and thou knoweſt not which way to turn thy ſelf for eaſe; then, perhaps at laſt, the prieſt is unwillingly ſent for, to patch up thy conſcience as well as he can, and to appeaſe the cries of it; and to force himſelf out of very pity and good nature "to "ſay peace, peace, when there is no peace." But

alas man! what can we do? what comfort can we give thee, when thine iniquities teſtify againſt thee to thy very face? How can there be peace, when thy luſts and debaucheries, thy impieties to God and thy injuries to men have been ſo many? How can there be peace, when thy whole life hath been a continued contempt and provocation of Almighty God, and a perpetual violence and affront to the light and reaſon of thy own mind?

Therefore whatever temptation there may be in ſin at a diſtance, whatever pleaſure in the act and commiſſion of it, yet remember that it always goes off with trouble, and will be bitterneſs in the end. Thoſe words of Solomon have a terrible ſting in the concluſion of them, "rejoice, O young man, in thy "youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy "youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and "in the ſight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for "all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment."

This one thought, which will very often unavoidably break into our minds (that "God will bring us "into judgment") is enough to daſh all our contentment, and to ſpoil all the pleaſure of a ſinful life. Never expect to be quiet in thine own mind, and to have the true enjoyment of thy ſelf, till thou liveſt a virtuous and religious life.

And if this diſcourſe be true (as I am confident I have every man's conſcience on my ſide) I ſay, if this be true, let us venture to be wiſe and happy, that is, to be religious. Let us reſolve to "break "off our ſins by repentance, to fear God and keep "his commandments," as ever we deſire to avoid the unſpeakable torments of a guilty mind, and would not be perpetually uneaſy to our ſelves. "Grant,

"Grant, we beſeech thee, Almighty GOD, that we "may every one of us know and do in this our day "the things that belong to our peace, before they be "hid from our eyes. And the GOD of peace which "brought again from the dead our LORD JESUS "CHRIST, the great ſhepherd of the ſheep, by the "blood of the everlaſting covenant, make us perfect "in every good work, to do his will, working in "us always that which is well-pleaſing in his ſight, "through JESUS CHRIST our LORD, to whom be "glory for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XIII.

The nature and benefit of conſideration.

PSAL. cxix. 59.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.

SERM. XIII.

THE two great cauſes of the ruin of men are infidelity, and want of conſideration. Some do not believe the principles of religion, or at leaſt have by arguing againſt them rendred them ſo doubtful to themſelves as to take away the force and efficacy of them: but theſe are but a very ſmall part of mankind, in compariſon of thoſe who periſh for want of conſidering theſe things. For moſt men take the principles of religion for granted,

SERM. XIII.

granted, that there is a GOD, and a providence, and a state of rewards and punishments after this life, and never entertained any considerable doubt in their minds to the contrary: but for all this they never attended to the proper and natural consequences of these principles, nor applied them to their own case; they never seriously considered the notorious inconsistency of their lives with this belief, and what manner of persons they ought to be who are verily persuaded of the truth of these things.

For no man that is convinced that there is a GOD, and considers the necessary and immediate consequences of such a persuasion, can think it safe to affront him by a wicked life: no man that believes the infinite happiness and misery of another world, and considers withal that one of these shall certainly be his portion according as he demeans himself in this present life, can think it indifferent what course he takes. Men may thrust away these thoughts and keep them out of their minds for a long time, but no man that enters into the serious consideration of these matters can possibly think it a thing indifferent to him whether he be happy or miserable for ever.

So that a great part of the evils of mens lives would be cured, if they would but once lay them to heart; would they but seriously consider the consequences of a wicked life, they would see so plain reason and so urgent a necessity for the reforming of it, that they would not venture to continue any longer in it. This course David took here in the text, and he found the happy success of it; "I thought "on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testi- "monies.

In

In which words there are these two things considerable.

I. The course which David here took for the reforming of his life; "I thought on my ways."

II. The success of this course. It produced actual and speedy reformation; "I thought on my ways, "and turned my feet unto thy testimonies; I made "haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

These are the two heads of my following discourse, which when I have spoken to I shall endeavour to persuade my self and you to take the same course which David here did, and GOD grant that I may have the same effect.

I. We will consider the course which David here took for the reforming of his life; "I thought on my "ways," or, as the words are rendered in our old translation, "I called my own ways to remembrance." And this may either signify a general survey and examination of his life, respecting indifferently the good or bad actions of it: or else, which is more probable, it may specially refer to the sins and miscarriages of his life; "I thought on my ways," that is, I called my sins to remembrance. Neither of these senses can be much amiss in order to the effect mentioned in the text, the reformation and amendment of our lives; and therefore neither of them can reasonably be excluded, though I shall principally insist upon the latter.

1. This thinking on our ways may signify a general survey and examination of our lives, respecting indifferently our good and bad actions. For way is a metaphorical word, denoting the course of a man's life and actions. "I thought on my ways," that is,

I ex-

SERM. XIII.

I examined my life, and called my self to a strict account for the actions of it; I compared them with the law of GOD, the rule and measure of my duty, and considered how far I had obeyed that law, or offended against it; how much evil I had been guilty of, and how little good I had done, in comparison of what I might and ought to have done: that by this means I might come to understand the true state and condition of my soul, and discerning how many and great my faults and defects were, I might amend whatever was amiss, and be more careful of my duty for the future.

And it must needs be a thing of excellent use for men to set apart some particular times for the examination of themselves, that they may know how accounts stand between GOD and them. Pythagoras (or whoever was the author of those golden verses which pass under his name) doth especially recommend this practice to his scholars, every night before they slept to call themselves to account for the actions of the day past; enquiring wherein they had transgressed, what good they had done that day, or omitted to do. And this, no doubt, is an admirable means to improve men in virtue, a most effectual way to keep our consciences continually waking and tender, and to make us stand in awe of our selves, and afraid to sin, when we know before-hand that we must give so severe an account to our selves of every action.

And certainly it is a great piece of wisdom to make up our accounts as frequently as we can, that our repentance may in some measure keep pace with the errors and failings of our lives, and that we may not be oppressed and confounded by the insupportable

weight of the sins of a whole life falling upon us at once; and that perhaps at the very worst time, when we are sick and weak, and have neither understanding nor leisure to recollect our selves, and to call our sins distinctly to remembrance, much less to exercise any fit and proper acts of repentance for them. For there is nothing to be done in religion when our reason is once departed from us; then darkness hath overtaken us indeed, and "the night is come when "no man can work." But though we were never so sensible and should do all we can at that time, yet after all this how it will go with us GOD alone knows. I am sure it is too much presumption for any man to be confident that one general and confused act of repentance will serve his turn for the sins of his whole life. Therefore there is great reason why we should often examine our selves, both in order to the amendment of our lives, and the ease of our consciences when we come to die. SERM. XIII.

2. This thinking of our ways may particularly and specially refer to the sins and miscarriages of our lives: "I thought on my ways," that is, I called my sins to remembrance; I took a particular account of the errors of my life, and laid them seriously to heart; I considered all the circumstances and consequences of them, and all other things belonging to them; and reasoning the matter throughly with my self, came to a peremptory and fixed resolution of breaking off this wicked course of life, and betaking my self to the obedience of GOD's laws. And the consideration of our ways taken in this sense (which seems to be the more probable meaning of the words) may reasonably imply in it these following particulars.

1. The taking of a particular account of our sins together with the several circumstances and aggravations of them.

2. A hearty trouble and sorrow for them; "I "thought on my ways," that is, I laid them sadly to heart.

3. A serious consideration of the evil and unreasonableness of a sinful course.

4. A due sense of the fearful and fatal consequences of a wicked life.

5. A full conviction of the necessity of quitting this course.

6. An apprehension of the possibility of doing this.

1. The taking of a particular account of our sins, together with the several circumstances and aggravations of them. And to this end we may do well to reflect particularly upon the several stages and periods of our lives, and to recollect at least the principal miscarriages belonging to each of them. And the better to enable us hereto it will be useful to have before our eyes some abridgment or summary of the laws of GOD, containing the chief heads of our duties and sins, of virtues and vices; for this will help to bring many of our faults and neglects to our remembrance, which otherwise perhaps would have been forgotten by us. We should likewise consider the several relations wherein we have stood to others, and how far we have transgressed or failed of our duty in any of these respects.

And having thus far made up our sad account, we may in a great measure understand the number and greatness of our sins; abating for some particulars which are slipped out of our memory, and for sins of ignorance,

ignorance, and daily infirmities which are innumerable. By all which we may see what vile wretches and grievous offenders we have been; especially if we take into consideration the several heavy circumstances of our sins, which do above measure aggravate them; the heinousness of many of them as to their nature, and the injurious consequences of them to the person, or estate, or reputation of our neighbour; their having been committed against the clear knowledge of our duty, against the frequent checks and convictions of our consciences, telling us when we did them that we did amiss; against so many motions and suggestions of God's holy Spirit, so many admonitions and reproofs from others; and contrary to our own most serious vows and resolutions, renewed at several times, especially upon the receiving of the blessed sacrament, and in times of sickness and distress: and all this notwithstanding the plainest declarations of God's will to the contrary, notwithstanding the terrors of the Lord and the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; notwithstanding the cruel sufferings of the son of God for our sins, and the most merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood. Add to this the scandal of our wicked lives to our holy religion, the ill example of them to the corrupting and debauching of others, the affront of them to the divine authority, and the horrible ingratitude of them to the mercy and goodness and patience of God to which we have such infinite obligations. Thus we should set our sins in order before our eyes with the several aggravations of them

2. A hearty trouble and sorrow for sin; "I thought "on my ways," that is, I laid my sins sadly to heart. And surely whenever we remember the faults and follies of our lives, we cannot but be inwardly touched and sensibly grieved at the thoughts of them; we cannot but hang down our heads, and smite upon our breasts, and be in pain and heaviness at our very hearts. I know that the tempers of men are very different, and therefore I do not say that tears are absolutely necessary to repentance, but they do very well become it; and a thorough sense of sin will almost melt the most hard and obdurate disposition, and fetch water out of a very rock. To be sure the consideration of our ways should cause inward trouble and confusion in our minds. The least we can do when we have done amiss is to be sorry for it, to condemn our own folly, and to be full of indignation and displeasure against our selves for what we have done, and to resolve never to do the like again. And let us make sure that our trouble and sorrow for sin have this effect, to make us leave our sins; and then we shall need to be the less solicitous about the degrees and outward expressions of it.

3. A serious consideration of the evil and unreasonableness of a sinful course. That sin is the stain and blemish of our natures, the reproach of our reason and understanding, the disease and the deformity of our souls, the great enemy of our peace, the cause of all our fears and troubles: that whenever we do a wicked action we go contrary to the clearest dictates of our reason and conscience, to our plain and true interest, and to the strongest ties and obligations of duty and gratitude. And which renders it yet more

unreasonable, sin is a voluntary evil which men wilfully bring upon themselves. Other evils may be forced upon us, whether we will or no; a man may be poor or sick by misfortune, but no man is wicked and vicious but by his own choice. How do we betray our folly and weakness by suffering our selves to be hurried away by every foolish lust and passion to do things which we know to be prejudicial and hurtful to our selves? And so base and unworthy in themselves that we are ashamed to do them, not only in the presence of a wise man, but even of a child or a fool. So that if sin were followed with no other punishment besides the guilt of having done a shameful thing, a man would not by intemperance make himself a fool and a beast; one would not be false and unjust, treacherous or unthankful, if for no other reason, yet out of meer greatness and generosity of mind, out of respect to the dignity of his nature, and out of very reverence to his own reason and understanding. For let witty men say what they will in defence of their vices, there are so many natural acknowledgments of the evil and unreasonableness of sin that the matter is past all denial: men are generally galled and uneasy at the thoughts of an evil action, both before and after they have committed it; they are ashamed to be taken in a crime, and heartily vexed and provoked whenever they are upbraided with it; and it is very observable, that though the greater part of the world always was bad, and vice hath ever had more servants and followers to cry it up, yet never was there any age so degenerate, in which vice could get the better of virtue in point of general esteem and reputation: even they whose wills

have

have been most enslaved to sin, could never yet so far bribe and corrupt their understandings as to make them give full approbation to it.

4. A due sense of the fearful and fatal consequences of a wicked life. And these are so sad and dreadful, and the danger of them so evident and so perpetually threatning us, that no temptation can be sufficient to excuse a man to himself and his own reason for venturing upon them. A principal point of wisdom is to look to the end of things; not only to consider the present pleasure and advantage of any thing, but also the ill consequences of it for the future, and to balance them one against the other.

Now sin in it's own nature tends to make men miserable. It certainly causes trouble and disquiet of mind: and to a considerate man, that knows how to value the ease and satisfaction of his own mind, there cannot be a greater argument against sin than to consider that the forsaking of it is the only way to find rest to our souls.

Besides this, every vice is naturally attended with some particular mischief and inconvenience, which makes it even in this life a punishment to it self; and commonly the providence of God and his just judgment upon sinners strikes in to heighten the mischievous consequences of a sinful course. This we have represented in the parable of the prodigal; his riotous course of life did naturally and of it self bring him to want, but the providence of God likewise concurred to render his condition more miserable, "at the same time there arose a mighty famine in "the land;" so that he did not only want wherewithal to supply himself, but was cut off from all hopes

hopes of relief from the abundance and superfluity of others. Sin brings many miseries upon us, and GOD many times sends more and greater than sin brings; and the further we go on in a sinful course, the more miseries and the greater difficulties we involve our selves in. SERM. XIII.

But all these are but light and inconsiderable in comparison of the dreadful miseries of another world; to the danger whereof every man that lives a wicked life doth every moment expose himself: so that if we could conquer shame, and had stupidity enough to bear the infamy and reproach of our vices, and the upbraidings of our consciences for them, and the temporal mischiefs and inconveniencies of them; though for the present gratifying of our lusts we could brook and dispense with all these, yet the consideration of the end and issue of a sinful course is an invincible objection against it and never to be answered; though the violence of our sensual appetites and inclinations should be able to bear down all temporal considerations whatsoever, yet methinks the interest of our everlasting happiness should lie near our hearts; the consideration of another world should mightily amaze and startle us; the horrors of eternal darkness and the dismal thoughts of being miserable for ever should effectually discourage any man from a wicked life. And this danger continually threatens the sinner, and may, if GOD be not merciful to him, happen to surprize him the next moment. And can we make too much haste to fly from so great and apparent a danger? When will we think of saving our selves, if not when (for ought we know) we are upon the very brink of ruin and just ready to drop into destruction?

5. Upon

5. Upon this naturally follows a full conviction of the neceſſity of quitting this wicked courſe. And neceſſity is always a powerful and over-ruling argument, and doth rather compel than perſuade: and after it is once evident leaves no place for further deliberation. And the greater the neceſſity is, it is ſtill the more cogent argument. For whatever is neceſſary is ſo in order to ſome end, and the greater the end the greater is the neceſſity of the means without which that end cannot be obtained. Now the chief and laſt end of all reaſonable creatures is happineſs, and therefore whatever is neceſſary in order to that hath the higheſt degree of rational and moral neceſſity. We are not capable of happineſs till we have left our ſins, for "without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the "LORD."

But though men are convinced of this neceſſity, yet this doth not always enforce a preſent change; becauſe men hope they may continue in their ſins, and remedy all at laſt by repentance. But this is ſo great a hazard in all reſpects that there is no venturing upon it. And in matters of greateſt concernment wiſe men will run no hazards if they can help it. David was ſo ſenſible of this danger, that he would not defer his repentance and the change of his life for one moment; "I thought on my ways, and "turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies: I made haſte "and delayed not to keep thy commandments." This day, this hour for ought we know may be the laſt opportunity of making our peace with GOD. Therefore we ſhould make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate as Lot did out of Sodom, leſt fire and brimſtone overtake us. He that cannot promiſe himſelf the

the next moment hath a great deal of reason to seize upon the present opportunity. While we are lingering in our sins, if GOD be not merciful to us we shall be consumed. Therefore "make haste," sinner, and "escape for thy life, lest evil overtake thee."

SERM. XIII.

6. Lastly, an apprehension of the possibility of making this change. GOD who designed us for happiness at first, and after we had made a forfeiture of it by sin, was pleased to restore us again to the capacity of it by the redemption of our blessed LORD and SAVIOUR, hath made nothing necessary to our happiness that is impossible for us to do, either of our selves, or by the assistance of that grace which he is ready to afford us if we heartily beg it of him. For that is possible to us which we may do by the assistance of another, if we may have that assistance for asking: and GOD hath promised to "give his holy "spirit to them that ask him." So that notwithstanding the great corruption and weakness of our natures, since the grace of GOD which brings salvation hath appeared, it is not absolutely out of our power to leave our sins and turn to GOD: for that may truly be said to be in our power which GOD hath promised to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to our selves.

So that there is nothing on GOD's part to hinder this change. He hath solemnly declared that he sincerely desires it, and that he is ready to assist our good resolutions to this purpose. And most certainly when he tells us, that "he hath no pleasure in "the death of a sinner, but rather that he should "turn from his wickedness and live; that he would "have all men to be saved, and to come to the

6.

SERM. XIII.

" knowledge of the truth; that he would not that " any should perish, but that all should come to re- " pentance;" he means plainly as he saith, and doth not speak to us with any private reserve or nice distinction between his secret and revealed will, that is, he doth not decree one thing and declare the contrary. So far is it from this, that if a sinner entertain serious thoughts of returning to GOD, and do but once move towards him, how ready is he to receive him! This is in a very lively manner described to us in the parable of the prodigal son, who when he was returning home, and " was yet a great way off," what haste doth his father make to meet him? " he saw " him, and had compassion, and ran." And if there be no impediment on GOD's part, why should there be any on ours? One would think all the doubt and difficulty should be on the other side, whether GOD would be pleased to shew mercy to such great offenders as we have been. But the business doth not stick there. And will we be miserable by our own choice, when the grace of GOD hath put it into our power to be happy? I have done with the first thing, the course which David here took for the reforming of his life; " I thought on my ways." I proceed to the

II. The success of this course. It produced actual and speedy reformation. " I turned my feet unto " thy testimonies; I made haste, and delayed not to " keep thy commandments." And if we consider the matter thoroughly, and have but patience to reason out the case with our selves, and to bring our thoughts and deliberations to some issue, the conclusion must naturally be the quitting of that evil and dangerous course in which we have lived. For sin

and

and consideration cannot long dwell together. Did but men consider what sin is, they would have so many unanswerable objections against it, such strong fears and jealousies of the miserable issue and event of a wicked life, that they would not dare to continue any longer in it.

I do not say, that this change is perfectly made at once. A state of sin and holiness are not like two ways that are just parted by a line, so as a man may step out of the one full into the other; but they are like two ways that lead to two very distant places, and consequently are at a good distance from one another, and the farther any man hath travelled in the one the farther he is from the other; so that it requires time and pains to pass from the one to the other. It sometimes so happens, that some persons are by a mighty conviction and resolution, and by a very extraordinary and overpowering degree of GOD's grace, almost perfectly reclaimed from their sins at once, and all of a sudden "translated out of the king-"dom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear son." And thus it was with many of the first converts to Christianity; as their prejudices against the Christian religion were strong and violent, so the holy spirit of GOD was pleased to work mightily in them that believed. But in the usual and settled methods of GOD's grace evil habits are mastered and subdued by degrees, and with a great deal of conflict, and many times after they are routed they rally and make head again; and it is a great while before the contrary habits of grace and virtue are grown up to any considerable degree of strength and maturity, and before a man comes to that confirmed state of goodness that

he may be said to have conquered and mortified his lusts. But yet this ought not to discourage us. For so soon as we have seriously begun this change, we are in a good way, and all our endeavours will have the acceptance of good beginnings, and God will be ready to help us; and if we pursue our advantages we shall every day gain ground, and the work will grow easier upon our hands; and we who moved at first with so much slowness and difficulty shall after a while be enabled to run the ways of God's commandments with pleasure and delight.

I have done with the two things I propounded to speak to from these words, the course here prescribed, and the success of it. And now to persuade men to take this course, I shall offer two or three arguments.

1. That consideration is the proper act of reasonable creatures. This argument God himself uses, to bring men to a consideration of their evil ways, Isa. xlvi. 8. "remember, and shew your selves men; bring "it again to mind, O ye transgressors." To consider our ways and to call our sins to remembrance, is to shew our selves men. 'Tis the great fault and infelicity of a great many, that they generally live without thinking, and are acted by their present inclinations and appetites without any consideration of the future consequences of things, and without fear of any thing but of a present and sensible danger; like brute creatures, who fear no evils but what are in view and just ready to fall upon them: whereas to a prudent and considerate man a good or evil in reversion is capable of as true an estimation, proportionably to the greatness and distance of it, as if it were really present. And what do we think God

has

has given us our reason and understandings for, but to foresee evils at a distance, and to prevent them; to provide for our future security and happiness, to look up "to God our maker, who hath taught us "more than the beasts of the earth, and made us wi- "ser than the fowls of heaven;" but to consider what we do, and what we ought to do, and what makes most for our future and lasting interest, and what against it? What can a beast do worse than to act without any consideration and design, than to pursue his present inclination without any apprehension of true danger? The most dull and stupid of all the brute creatures can hardly exercise less reason than this comes to. So that for a man not to consider his ways is to the very best intents and purposes to be without understanding, and like the beasts that perish.

2. This is the end of God's patience and long suffering towards us, to bring us to consideration. The great design of God's goodness is to "lead men to "repentance. He winks at the sins of men, that they "may repent." He bears long with us, and delays the punishment of our sins, and doth not execute judgment speedily, because he is loth to surprise men into destruction; because he would give them the liberty of second thoughts, time to reflect upon themselves, and to consider what they have done, and to reason themselves into repentance. "Consider this "all ye that forget God," lest his patience turn into fury, and "he tear you in pieces, and there be "none to deliver you."

3. Consideration is that which we must all come to one time or other. Time will come when we shall consider and cannot help it, when we shall not be able

able to divert our thoughts from those things which we are now so loth to think upon. Our consciences will take their opportunity to bring our ways to remembrance, when some great calamity or affliction is upon us. Thus it was with the prodigal when he was brought to the very last extremity and "was ready "to perish with hunger, then he came to himself." When we come to die, then we shall think of our ways with trouble and vexation enough; and how glad would we then be that we had time to consider them? And perhaps while we are wishing for more time eternity will swallow us up. To be sure in the other world, a great part of the misery of wicked men will consist in furious reflections upon themselves and the evil actions of their lives. 'Tis said of the rich voluptuous man in the parable, that "in hell "he lift up his eyes being in torment;" as if he had never considered and bethought himself till that time. But alas! it will then be too late to consider: for then consideration will do us no good; it will serve to no other purpose but to aggravate our misery, and to multiply our stings, and to give new life and rage to those vultures which will perpetually prey upon our hearts. But how much a wiser course would it be to consider these things in time, in order to our eternal peace and comfort; to think of them while we may redress them and avoid the dismal consequences of them, than when our case is desperate and past remedy?

And now what can I say more to persuade every one of us to a consideration of our own ways? We are generally apt to busy our selves in observing the errors and miscarriages of our neighbours, and are forward

forward to mark and censure the faults and follies of other men; but how few descend into themselves, and turn their eyes inward, and say what have I done? 'Tis an excellent saying of Antoninus the great emperor and philosopher, "no man was ever unhappy for not prying into the actions and conditions of "other men, but that man is necessarily unhappy "who doth not observe himself and consider the state "of his own soul." SERM. XIII.

This is our proper work; and now is a proper season for it, when we pretend to GOD and men to set apart a solemn time for the examination of our selves, and for a serious review of our lives in order to humiliation and repentance, to the reforming and amendment of what is amiss. And though we would venture to dissemble with men, yet let us not dissemble with GOD also; "for shall not he that pondereth the "heart consider it; and he that keepeth the soul, "shall he not know it; and shall not he render to e-"very man according to his ways?"

I know it is a very unpleasant work which I am now putting you upon, and therefore no wonder that men are generally so backward to it; because it will of necessity give some present disturbance to their minds. They whose lives have been very vicious are so odious a sight, so horrid a spectacle to themselves, that they cannot endure to reflect upon their own ways; of all things in the world they hate consideration, and are ready to say to it as the evil spirit did in the gospel to our SAVIOUR, "What have I to do "with thee? Art thou come to torment me before the time?" But let not this affright us from it; for whatever trouble it may cause at present, it is the

only

SERM. XIII.

only way to prevent the anguish and the torments of eternity.

The things which I have offered to your consideration are of huge moment and importance. They do not concern your bodies and estates, but that which is more truly your selves, your immortal souls, the deerest and most durable part of our selves: and they do not concern us for a little while, but for ever. Let me therefore bespeak your most serious regard to them in the words of Moses to the people of Israel, after he had set the law of God before them, together with the blessings promised to obedience, and the terrible curse threatned to the transgression of it, Deut. xxxii. 46. "Set your hearts to the words which I "testify to you this day, for it is not a vain thing, "because it is your life." Your life, your eternal life and happiness depends upon it.

And besides a tender regard to your selves and your own interests, which methinks every man out of a natural desire of being happy and dread of being miserable should be forward enough to consider: be pleased likewise to lay to heart the influence of your example upon others. I speak now to a great many persons, the eminence of whose rank and quality renders their examples so powerful as to be able almost to give authority either to virtue or vice. People take their fashions from you, as to the habits of their minds as well as their bodies. So that upon you chiefly depends the ruin or reformation of manners, our hopes or despair of a better world. What way soever you go you are followed by troops. If you run any sinful or dangerous course, you cannot "perish alone in your iniquity, but thousands will fall

" by your side, and ten thousands at your right SERM. XIII.
" hand :" and on the contrary, it is very much in your power, and I hope in your wills and designs, to be the sovereign restorers of piety and virtue to a degenerate age. It is our part indeed to exhort men to their duty, but it is you that would be the powerful and effectual preachers of righteousness. We may endeavour to make men proselytes to virtue, but you would infallibly draw disciples after you : we may try to persuade, but you could certainly prevail, either to make men good, or to restrain them from being so bad.

Therefore consider your ways, for the sake of others as well as your selves. Consider what you have done, and then consider what is fit for you to do, and if you do it not, what will be the end of these things? And to help you froward in this work it is not necessary that I should rip up the vices of the age, and set mens sins in order before them. It is much better that you your selves should call your own ways to remembrance. We have every one a faithful monitor and witness in our own breasts, who, if we will but hearken to him, will deal impartially with us, and privately tell us the errors of our lives. To this monitor I refer you, and to the grace of GOD, to make these admonitions effectual.

Let us then every one of us, in the fear of GOD, " search and try our ways, and turn unto the LORD." Let us " take to our selves words, and say" to GOD with those true penitents in scripture, " *I* have sinned, " what shall be done unto thee, O thou preserver " of men? Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer " thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, I will

" abhor my self, and repent in dust and ashes. " For " surely it is meet to be said unto GOD, I will not " offend any more; that which I know not teach thou " me, and if I have done any iniquity I will do no " more. O that there were such an heart in us! O " that we were wise, that we understood this, that " we would consider our latter end!" and GOD of his infinite mercy inspire into every one of our hearts this holy and happy resolution, for the sake of our blessed SAVIOUR and redeemer, to whom with the father and the holy Ghost be all honour and glory now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XIV.

The folly and danger of irresolution and delaying.

PSAL. cxix. 60.

I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

SERM. XIV.

IN the words immediately going before you have the course which David took for the reforming of his life, and the success of that course; " I " thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy " testimonies." A serious reflection upon the past errors and miscarriages of his life produced the reformation of it. And you have a considerable circumstance added in these words that I have now read

to

to you, that this reformation was speedy and without delay, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy "commandments." Upon due consideration of his former life, and a full conviction of the necessity of a change, he came to a resolution of a better life, and immediately put this resolution in execution; and to declare how presently and quickly he did it, he expresses it both affirmatively and negatively, after the manner of the Hebrews, who when they would say a thing with great certainty and emphasis, are wont to express it both ways, "I made haste, and delayed not;" that is, I did with all imaginable speed betake my self to a better course. SERM. XIV.

And this is the natural effect of consideration, and the true cause why men delay so necessary a work is, because they stifle their reason, and suffer themselves to be hurried into the embraces of present objects, and do not consider their latter end, and what will be the sad issue and event of a wicked life. For if men would take an impartial view of their lives, and but now and then reflect upon themselves, and lay to heart the miserable and fatal consequences of a sinful course, and think whither it will bring them at last, and that the end of these things will be death and misery: if the carnal and sensual person would but look about him, and consider how many have been ruined in the way that he is in, how many lie "slain and "wounded in it, that it is the way to hell, and leads "down to the chambers of death," this would certainly give a check to him, and stop him in his course.

For it is not to be imagined but that that man who hath duly considered what sin is, the shortness of it's

pleasures, and the eternity of it's punishment, should resolve immediately to break off his sins and to live another kind of life. Would any man be intemperate and walk after the flesh, would any man be unjust and defraud or oppress his neighbour, be profane and live in the contempt of GOD and religion, or allow himself in any wicked course whatsoever, that considers and believes a judgment to come, and that because of these things the terrible vengeance of GOD will one day fall upon the children of disobedience? It is not credible that men who apply themselves seriously to the meditation of these matters should venture to continue in so imprudent and dangerous a course, or could by any temptation whatsoever be trained on one step farther in a way that does so certainly and visibly lead to ruin and destruction.

So that my work at this time shall be, to endeavour to convince men of the monstrous folly and unreasonableness of delaying the reformation and amendment of their lives; and to persuade us to resolve upon it, and having resolved, to set about it immediately and without delay; in imitation of the good man here in the text, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep "thy commandments." And to this end, I shall

First, consider the reasons and excuses which men pretend for delaying this necessary work, and shew the unreasonableness of them.

Secondly, I shall add some farther considerations to engage us effectually to set about this work speedily and without delay.

I. We will consider a little the reasons and excuses which men pretend for delaying this necessary work; and not only shew the unreasonableness of them, but

that

that they are each of them a strong reason and powerful argument to the contrary.

1. Many pretend that they are abundantly convinced of the great necessity of leaving their sins and betaking themselves to a better course, and they fully intend to do so; only they cannot at present bring themselves to it, but they hope hereafter to be in a better temper and disposition, and then they resolve by God's grace to set about this work in good earnest, and to go through with it.

I know not whether it be fit to call this a reason; I am sure it is the greatest cheat and delusion that any man can put upon himself. For this plainly shews that thou dost not intend to do this which thou art convinced is so necessary, but to put it off from day to day. For there is no greater evidence that a man doth not really intend to do a thing, than when notwithstanding he ought upon all accounts, and may in all respects better do it at present than hereafter, yet he still puts it off. Whatever thou pretendest, this is a meer shift to get rid of a present trouble. It is like giving good words, and making fair promises to a clamorous and importunate creditor, and appointing him to come another day, when the man knows in his conscience that he intends not to pay him, and that he shall be less able to discharge the debt then, than he is at present. Whatever reasons thou hast against reforming thy life now, will still remain and be in as full force hereafter, nay probably stronger than they are at present. Thou art unwilling now, and so thou wilt be hereafter, and in all likelihood much more unwilling. So that this reason will every day improve upon thy hands, and have so much the

SERM. XIV.

more ſtrength by how much the longer thou continueſt in thy ſins. Thou haſt no reaſon in the world againſt the preſent time but only that it is preſent; why when hereafter comes to be preſent the reaſon will be juſt the ſame. So that thy preſent unwillingneſs is ſo far from being a juſt reaſon againſt it, that it is a good reaſon the other way; becauſe thou art unwilling now, and like to be ſo, nay more ſo hereafter; if thou intendeſt to do it at all thou ſhouldeſt ſet about it immediately, and without delay.

2. Another reaſon which men pretend for the delaying of this work, is the great difficulty and unpleaſantneſs of it. And it cannot be denied but that there will be ſome bitterneſs and uneaſineſs in it, proportionably to the growth of evil habits, and the ſtrength of our luſts, and our greater or leſs progreſs and continuance in a ſinful courſe: ſo that we muſt make account of a ſharp conflict, of ſome pain and trouble in the making of this change, that it will coſt us ſome pangs and throws before we be born again. For when nature hath been long bent another way, it is not to be expected that it ſhould be reduced and brought back to it's firſt ſtraightneſs without pain and violence.

But then it is to be conſidered, that how difficult and painful ſoever this work be it is neceſſary, and that ſhould overrule all other conſiderations whatſoever; that if we will not be at this pains and trouble, we muſt one time or other endure far greater than thoſe which we now ſeek to avoid; that it is not ſo difficult as we imagine, but our fears of it are greater than the trouble will prove; if we were but once reſolved upon the work, and ſeriouſly engaged in it,

the

the greatest part of the trouble were over; it is like the fear of children to go into the cold water, a faint trial increaseth their fear and apprehension of it; but so soon as they have plunged into it the trouble is over, and then they wonder why they were so much afraid. The main difficulty and unpleasantness is in our first entrance into religion; it presently grows tolerable, and soon after easy, and after that by degrees so pleasant and delightful, that the man would not for all the world return to his former evil state and condition of life. SERM. XIV.

We should consider likewise what is the true cause of all this trouble and difficulty; it is our long continuance in a sinful course that hath made us so loth to leave it; it is the custom of sinning that renders it so troublesom and uneasy to men to do otherwise: it is the greatness of our guilt, heightned and enflamed by many and repeated provocations, that doth so gall our consciences, and fill our souls with so much terror: it is because we have gone so far in an evil way that our retreat is become so difficult, and because we have delayed this work so long that we are now so unwilling to go about it; and consequently, the longer we delay it the trouble and difficulty of a change will encrease daily upon us. And all these considerations are so far from being a good reason for more delays, that they are a strong argument to the contrary: because the work is difficult now, therefore do not make it more so; and because your delays have encreased the difficulty of it, and will do more and more, therefore delay no longer.

3. Another pretended encouragement to these delays is the great mercy and patience of God. He com-

SERM. XIV.

commonly bears longer with ſinners, and therefore there is no ſuch abſolute and urgent neceſſity of a ſpeedy repentance and reformation of our lives. Men have not the face to give this for a reaſon, but yet for all that it lies at the bottom of many mens hearts: So Solomon tells us, Eccleſ. viii. 11. "Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, "therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet "in them to do evil.

But it is not always thus. There are few of us but have ſeen ſeveral inſtances of GOD's ſeverity to ſinners, and have known ſeveral perſons ſurpriſed by a ſudden hand of GOD, and cut off in the very act of ſin without having the leaſt reſpite given them, without time or liberty ſo much as to aſk GOD forgiveneſs, and to conſider either what they had done, or whither they were going. And this may be the caſe of any ſinner, and is ſo much the more likely to be thy caſe becauſe thou doſt ſo boldly preſume upon the mercy and patience of GOD.

But if it were always thus, and thou wert ſure to be ſpared yet a while longer; what can be more unreaſonable and diſingenuous than to reſolve to be evil becauſe GOD is good, and becauſe he ſuffers ſo long to ſin ſo much the longer, and becauſe he affords thee a ſpace of repentance therefore to delay it and put it off to the laſt? The proper deſign of GOD's goodneſs is to lead men to repentance, and he never intended his patience for an encouragement to men to continue in their ſins, but for an opportunity and an argument to break them off by repentance.

Theſe are the pretended reaſons and encouragements to men to delay their repentance and the reformation

formation of their lives, and you see how groundless and unreasonable they are; which was the first thing I propounded to speak to. SERM. XIV.

II. I shall add some farther considerations, to engage men effectually to set about this work speedily, and without delay. And because they are many I shall insist upon those which are most weighty and considerable, without being very curious and solicitous about the method and order of them: For provided they be but effectual to the end of persuasion, it matters not how inartificially they are ranged and disposed.

1. Consider, that in matters of great and necessary concernment, and which must be done, there is no greater argument of a weak and impotent mind than irresolution; to be undetermined where the case is so plain and the necessity so urgent; to be always about doing that which we are convinced must be done.

Victuros agimus semper, nec vivimus unquam.

We are always intending to live a new life, but can never find a time to set about it. This is as if a man should put off eating and drinking and sleeping from one day and night to another, till he have starved and destroyed himself. It seldom falls under any man's deliberation whether he should live or not, if he can chuse; and if he cannot chuse, it is in vain to deliberate about it. It is much more absurd to deliberate whether we should live virtuously or religiously, soberly or righteously in the world, for that upon the matter is to consult whether a man should be happy or not: nature hath determined this for us,

and we need not reaſon about it; and conſequently, we ought not to delay that which we are convinced is ſo neceſſary in order to it.

2. Conſider that religion is a great and a long work, and aſks ſo much time that there is none left for the delaying of it. To begin with repentance, which is commonly our firſt entrance into religion; this alone is a great work, and is not only the buſineſs of a ſudden thought and reſolution, but of execution and action: It is the abandoning of a ſinful courſe, which we cannot leave till we have in ſome degree maſtered our luſts; for ſo long as they are our maſters, like Pharaoh, they will keep us in bondage and "not "let us go to ſerve the LORD." The habits of ſin and vice are not to be plucked up and caſt off at once; as they have been long in contracting, ſo without a miracle it will require a competent time to ſubdue them and get the victory over them; for they are conquered juſt by the ſame degrees that the habits of grace and virtue grow up and get ſtrength in us.

So that there are ſeveral duties to be done in religion, and often to be repeated; many graces and virtues are to be long practiſed and exerciſed before the contrary vices will be ſubdued, and before we arrive to a confirmed and ſettled ſtate of goodneſs; ſuch a ſtate as can only give us a clear and comfortable evidence of the ſincerity of our reſolution and repentance, and of our good condition towards GOD. We have many luſts to mortify, many paſſions to govern and bring into order; much good to do, to make what amends and reparation we can for the much evil we have done: we have many things to learn; and many to unlearn, to which we ſhall be ſtrongly

prompted by the corrupt inclinations of our nature, and the remaining power of ill habits and customs: and perhaps we may have satisfaction and restitution to make for the many injuries we have done to others, in their persons, or estates, or reputations: in a word, we have a body of sin to put off, which clings close to us and is hard to part with: we have to "cleanse "our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and "to perfect holiness in the fear of GOD;" to encrease and improve our graces and virtues; to "add to our "faith knowledge, and temperance, and patience, "and brotherly kindness, and charity; and to abound "in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by JESUS CHRIST to the praise and glory of GOD:" we have to be useful to the world, and exemplary to others in a holy and virtuous conversation; our "light is so to shine before men, that others may see "our good works, and glorify our father which is in "heaven. SERM. XIV.

And do we think all this is to be done in an instant, and requires no time? That we may delay and put off to the last, and yet do all this work well enough? Do we think we can do all this in time of sickness and old age, when we are not fit to do any thing; when "the spirit of a man" can hardly bear the infirmities of nature, much less a guilty conscience and a wounded spirit? Do we think that when the day hath been idly spent and squandred away by us, that we shall be fit to work when the night and darkness comes? When our understanding is weak, and our memory frail, and our will crooked, and by a long custom of sinning obstinately bent the wrong way, what can we then do in religion? What rea-

SERM. XIV.

sonable or acceptable service can we then perform to God? When our candle is just sinking into the socket, how shall "our light so shine before men, that "others may see our good works?"

Alas! the longest life is no more than sufficient for a man to reform himself in, to repent of the errors of his life, and to amend what is amiss: to put our souls into a good posture and preparation for another world, to train up our selves for eternity, and to make our selves "meet to be made partakers of the inheri-"tance of the saints in light."

3. Consider what a desperate hazard we run by these delays. Every delay of repentance is a venturing the main chance. It is uncertain whether hereafter we shall have time for it, and if we have time whether we shall have a heart to it, and the assistance of God's grace to go thorough with it. God indeed hath been graciously pleased to promise pardon to repentance, but he hath no were promised life and leisure, the aids of his grace and holy spirit to those who put off their repentance: he hath no where promised acceptance to meer sorrow and trouble for sin, without "fruits meet for repentance, and amendment "of life:" he hath no where promised to receive them to mercy and favour who only give him good words, and are at last contented to condescend so far to him as to promise to leave their sins when they can keep them no longer. Many have gone thus far in times of affliction and sickness, as to be awakened to a great sense of their sins, and to be mightily troubled for their wicked lives, and to make solemn promises and professions of becoming better; and yet upon their deliverance and recovery all hath vanished

SERM. XIV.

vanished and come to nothing, and their "righte-"ousness hath been as the morning cloud, and as "the early dew which passeth away:" and why should any man, meerly upon account of a death-bed repentance, reckon himself in a better condition than those persons who have done as much and gone as far as he; and there is no other difference between them but this, that the repentance of the former was tried and proved insincere, but the death bed-repentance never came to a trial; and yet for all that GOD knows whether it were sincere or not, and how it would have proved if the man had lived longer. Why should any man for offering up to GOD the meer refuse and dregs of his life, and the days "which "himself hath no pleasure in," expect to receive the reward of eternal life and happiness at his hands?

But though we do not design to delay this work so long, yet ought we to consider that all delays in a matter of this consequence are extremely dangerous; because we put off a business of the greatest concernment to the future, and in so doing put it to the hazard whether ever it shall be done: for the future is as much out of our power to command, as it is to call back the time which is past. Indeed if we could arrest time and strike off the nimble wheels of his chariot, and like Joshua bid the sun stand still, and make opportunity tarry as long as we had occasion for it; this were something to excuse our delay, or at least to mitigate or abate the folly and unreasonableness of it: but this we cannot do. It is in our power, under the influence of GOD's grace and holy spirit, to amend our lives now, but it is not in our power to live till to morrow; and who will part with

with an eſtate in hand, which he may preſently enter upon the poſſeſſion of, for an uncertain reverſion? And yet thus we deal in the great and everlaſting concernments of our ſouls; we trifle away the preſent opportunities of ſalvation, and vainly promiſe to our ſelves the future; we let go that which is in our power, and fondly diſpoſe of that which is out of our power, and in the hands of GOD.

Lay hold then upon the preſent opportunities, and look upon every action thou doſt, and every opportunity of doing any, as poſſibly thy laſt; for ſo it may prove, for any thing thou canſt tell to the contrary. If a man's life lay at ſtake and he had but one throw for it, with what care and with what concernment would he manage that action? What thou art doing next may, for ought thou knoweſt, be for thy life and for all eternity. So much of thy life is moſt certainly paſt, and GOD knows thou haſt yet done little or nothing towards the ſecuring of thy future happineſs: it is not certain how much or how little is remaining, therefore be ſure to make the beſt uſe of that little which may be left, and wiſely to manage the laſt ſtake.

4. Seeing the delay of repentance doth mainly rely upon the hopes and encouragement of a future repentance, let us conſider a little how unreaſonable theſe hopes are, and how abſurd the encouragement is which men take from them. To ſin in hopes that hereafter we ſhall repent, is to do a thing in hopes that we ſhall one day be mightily aſhamed of it, that we ſhall one time or other be heartily grieved and troubled that we have done it: it is to do a thing in hopes that we ſhall afterwards condemn our ſelves for it,

it, and wish a thousand times we had never done it; in hopes that we shall be full of horror at the thoughts of what we have done, and shall treasure up so much guilt in our consciences as will make us a terror to our selves, and be ready to drive us even to despair and distraction. And is this a reasonable hope? Is this a fitting encouragement for a wise man to give to himself, to any action? And yet this is plainly the true meaning of mens going on in their sins, in hopes that hereafter they shall repent of them. SERM. XIV.

5. If you be still resolved to delay this business and put it off at present, consider well with your selves how long you intend to delay it. I hope not to the last, not till sickness come and death make his approaches to you. This is next to madness, to venture all upon such an after-game. 'Tis just as if a man should be content to be shipwreckt, in hope, that he shall afterwards escape by a plank and get safe to shore. But I hope none are so unreasonable, yet I fear that many have a mind to put it off to old age, though they do not care to say so. Seneca expostulates excellently with this sort of men; "Who shall ensure "thy life till that time? Who shall pass his word for "thee, that the providence of God will suffer all "things to happen and fall out just as thou hast de"signed and forecast them? Art thou not ashamed to "reserve the reliques of thy life for thy self, and "set apart only that time to be wise and virtuous in, "which is good for nothing? How late is it then to "begin to live well when thy life is almost at an end? "What a stupid forgetfulness is it of our mortality, "to put off good resolutions to the fiftieth or sixtieth "year of our age, and resolve to begin to do bet-

"ter

"ter at that time of life to which very few perſons "have reached?"

But perhaps thou art not altogether ſo unreaſonable, but deſireſt only to reſpite this work till the firſt heat of youth and luſt be over, till the cooler and more conſiderate part of thy life come on; that perhaps thou thinkeſt may be the fitteſt and moſt convenient ſeaſon. But ſtill we reckon upon uncertainties, for perhaps that ſeaſon may never be: however, to be ſure it is much more in our power, by the aſſiſtance of GOD's grace, which is never wanting to the ſincere endeavours of men, to conquer our luſts now, and to reſiſt the moſt heady and violent temptations to vice, than either to ſecure the future time, or to recover that which is once paſt and gone.

Some ſeem yet more reaſonable, and are content to come lower, and deſire only to put it off for a very little while. But why for a little while? Why till to morrow? To morrow will be as this day, only with this difference, that thou wilt in all probability be more unwilling and indiſpoſed then.

So that there is no future time which any man can reaſonably pitch upon. All delay in this caſe is dangerous, and as ſenſleſs as the expectation of the idiot deſcribed by the poet, who being come to the river ſide and intending to paſs over, ſtays till all the water in the river be gone by and hath left the channel a dry paſſage for him.

———*at ille*
Labitur, & labetur in omne volubilis ævum.

But the river runs, and runs, and will run, and if he ſhould ſtay a thouſand years will never be the nearer being

being dry. So that if the man must go over, and there be necessity for it, (as there is for repentance) the only wise resolution to be taken in this case, is to wade or swim over as well as he can, because the matter will never be amended by tarrying. SERM. XIV.

6. Lastly, consider what an unspeakable happiness it is to have our minds settled in that condition, that we may without fear and amazement, nay with comfort and confidence expect death and judgment. Death is never far from any of us, and the general judgment of the world may be nearer than we are aware of; for "of that day and hour knoweth no "man:" and these are two terrible things, and nothing can free us from the terror of them but a good conscience, and a good conscience is only to be had either by innocence, or by repentance and amendment of life. Happy man! who by this means is at peace with GOD, and with himself; and can think of death and judgment without dread and astonishment. For "the sting of death is sin;" and the terror of the great day only concerns those who have lived wickedly and impenitently, and would not be persuaded, neither by the mercies of GOD, nor by the fear of his judgments, to repent and turn to him: but if we have truly forsaken our sins, and do sincerely endeavour to live in obedience to the laws and commands of GOD, the more we think of death and judgment the greater matter of joy and comfort will these things be to us: for "blessed is that servant, "whom his LORD when he comes shall find so do-"ing." Let us therefore as soon as possibly we can put our selves into this posture and preparation according to that advice of our blessed SAVIOUR, Luke xii.

xii. 35, 36. "Let your loins be girded about, and "your lamps burning, and ye your ſelves like unto "men that wait for their LORD."

And now I hope that enough hath been ſaid to convince men of the great unreaſonableneſs and folly of theſe delays; nay I believe that moſt men are convinced of it by their own thoughts, and that their conſciences call them fools a thouſand times for it: but O that I knew what to ſay that might prevail with men and effectually perſuade them to do that which they are ſo abundantly convinced is ſo neceſſary.

And here I might addreſs my ſelf to the ſeveral ages of perſons. You that are young, and have hitherto been in a good meaſure innocent, may prevent the devil, and by an early piety give GOD the firſt poſſeſſion of your ſouls; and by this means never be put to the trouble of ſo great and ſolemn a repentance, having never been deeply engaged in a wicked life: you may do a glorious, I had almoſt ſaid a meritorious thing, in cleaving ſtedfaſtly to GOD and reſolving to ſerve him, when you are ſo importunately courted and ſo hotly aſſaulted by the devil and the world. However, you may not live to be old; therefore upon that conſideration begin the work preſently, and make uſe of the opportunity that is now in your hands.

You that are grown up to ripeneſs of years and are in the full vigour of your age, you are to be put in mind that the heat and inconſiderateneſs of youth is now paſt and gone, that reaſon and conſideration are now in their perfection and ſtrength, that this is the very age of prudence and diſcretion, of wiſdom and warineſs:

warineſs: ſo that now is the proper time for you to be ſerious, and wiſely to ſecure your future happineſs.

As for thoſe that are old, they methinks ſhould need no body to admoniſh them, that it is now high time for them to begin a new life, and that the time paſt of their lives is too much to have ſpent in ſin and folly. There is no trifling where men have a great work to do, and but little time to do it in. Your ſun is certainly going down and near it's ſetting, therefore you ſhould quicken your pace, conſidering that your journey is never the ſhorter becauſe you have but little time to perform it in. Alas man! thou art juſt ready to die, and haſt thou not yet begun to live? Are thy paſſions and luſts yet unſubdued, and have they had no other mortification than what age hath given them? 'Tis ſtrange to ſee how in the very extremities of old age, many men are as if they had ſtill a thouſand years to live, and make no preparation for death, though it dogs them at the heels and is juſt come up to them and ready to give them the fatal ſtroke.

Therefore let us not put off this neceſſary work of reforming our ſelves, in what part and age of our lives ſoever we be. "To day, whilſt it is called to "day, leſt any of you be hardened through the de- "ceitfulneſs of ſin." Nay to day is with the lateſt to begin this work, had we been wiſe we would have begun it ſooner. It is GOD's infinite mercy to us that it is not quite too late, that the day of GOD's patience is not quite expired, and the door ſhut againſt us. Therefore do not defer your repentance to the next ſolemn time, to the next occaſion of receiving the bleſſed ſacrament: do not ſay I will then

reform and become a new man, after that I will take leave of my luſts and ſin no more. For let us make what haſte we can we cannot poſſibly make too much.

——*properat vivere nemo ſatis.*

No man makes haſte enough to be good, to "ceaſe "to do evil, and to learn to do well." Be as quick as we will life will be too nimble for us, and go on faſter than our work does, and death will go nigh to prevent us and ſurprize us unawares.

Do, do, ſinner; abuſe and neglect thy ſelf yet a little while longer, till the time of regarding thy ſoul and working out thine own ſalvation be at an end, and all the opportunities of minding that great concernment be ſlipped out of thy hands, never to be recovered, never to be called back again; no, not by thy moſt earneſt wiſhes and deſires, by thy moſt fervent prayers and tears; and thou be brought into the condition of prophane Eſau, who for once deſpiſing the bleſſing loſt it for ever, "and found no "place of repentance though he ſought it carefully "with tears."

To conclude: art thou convinced that thy eternal happineſs depends upon following the advice which hath now been given thee? Why then do but behave thy ſelf in this caſe, as thou and all prudent men are wont to do in matters which thou canſt not but acknowledge to be of far leſs concernment. If a man be travelling to ſuch a place, ſo ſoon as he finds himſelf out of the way he preſently ſtops and makes towards the right way, and hath no inclination to go wrong any farther: if a man be ſick, he will be well preſently, if he can, and not put it off

to the future: most men will gladly take the first opportunity that presents it self, of being rich or great, every man almost catches at the very first offers of a great place or a good purchase, and secures them presently if he can, lest the opportunity be gone and another snatch these things from him. Do thou thus so much more in matters so much greater. Return from the error of thy way, be wise, save thy self, as soon as possibly thou canst. When happiness presents it self to thee do not turn it off, and bid it come again to morrow. Perhaps thou mayest never be so fairly offered again, perhaps the day of salvation may not come again to morrow, nay perhaps to thee to morrow may never come. But if we were sure that happiness would come again, yet why should we put it off? Does any man know how to be safe and happy to day, and can he find in his heart to tarry till to morrow?

Now the God of all mercy and patience give every one of us the wisdom and grace to know and to do, "in this our day, the things that belong to our "peace, before they be hid from our eyes;" for the sake of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer, "to "whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be "all honour and glory now and for ever. Amen.

SER-

SERMON XV.

The distinguishing character of a good and a bad man.

---

1 JOHN iii. 10.

In this the children of GOD *are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is not of* GOD.

SERM. XV.

IT is certainly a matter of the greatest consequence to us, both in order to our present peace and future happiness, truly to understand our spiritual state and condition, and whether we belong to GOD and be his children or not: and it is not so difficult as is commonly imagined to arrive at this knowledge, if we have a mind to it, and will but deal impartially with our selves; for the text gives us a plain mark and character whereby we may know it, "in this "the children of GOD are manifest, and the children "of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is "not of GOD."

From which words I shall endeavour by GOD's assistance to lay men open to themselves, and to represent to every one of us the truth of our condition; and then leave it to the grace of GOD, and every man's serious consideration, to make the best use of it.

SERM. XV.

And it will conduce very much to the clearing of this matter to consider briefly the occasion of these words. And this will best appear by attending stedfastly to the main scope and design of this epistle. And I think that no man that reads it with attention can doubt but that it is particularly designed against the impious sect of the Gnostics who, as the fathers tell us, sprang from Simon Magus, and pretended to extraordinary knowledge and illumination, from whence they had the name of Gnosticks; but notwithstanding this glittering pretence they did allow themselves in all manner of impious and vicious practices, "turning the grace of GOD into lasciviousness," as St. Jude speaks of them. And that St. John aims particularly at this sort of men is very evident from the frequent and plain allusions throughout this epistle to those names and titles which this sect assumed to themselves, as chap. ii. ver. 4. "he that saith, I know "him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a li- "ar, and the truth is not in him," And verse 9. "he that saith he is in the light, and hateth his "brother, is in darkness even until now." Which passages, and many more in this epistle, do plainly refer to the pretences of this sect to more than ordinary knowledge and illumination in the mysteries of religion; notwithstanding they did so notoriously contradict these glorious pretences by the impiety of their lives, and particularly by their hatred and enmity to their fellow-Christians. For, as the ancient fathers tell us, they pretended that whatever they did they could not sin: and this our apostle intimates in the beginning of this epistle, "if we say "that we have no sin we deceive our selves, and the "truth

SERM. XV.

" truth is not in us." And they held it lawful to renounce Christianity to avoid persecution ; and not only so, but also to join with the heathen in persecuting the Christians ; which seems to be the reason why the apostle so often taxeth them " for hatred to their " brethren," and calls them murtherers.

Now to shew the inconsistence of these principles and practices with Christianity the apostle useth many arguments, amongst which he particularly insisteth upon this, that nothing is more essential to a disciple of CHRIST and a child of GOD (by which titles Christians were commonly known) than to abstain from the practice of all sin and wickedness ; ver. 6. of this chap. " whosoever abideth in him sinneth not ; who- " soever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known " him," (whatever knowledge they might pretend to, it was evident they were destitute of the true knowledge of GOD and his son JESUS CHRIST) and verse 7. " little children, let no man deceive you ; he " that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is " righteous ;" and verse 8. " he that committeth sin " is of the devil ;" and verse 9. " whosoever is born " of GOD doth not commit sin ;" let men pretend what they will, wickedness is a plain mark and character of one that belongs to the devil ; as on the contrary righteousness is an evidence of a " child " of GOD, in this the children of GOD are manifest, " and the children of the devil, &c.

I shall briefly explain the words, and then consider the matter contained in them.

By the children of GOD, and the children of the devil, are meant good and bad men ; it being usual in the phrase of scripture to call persons or things which

which partake of such a nature or quality the children of those who are eminently endued with that nature and disposition. Thus they who are of the faith of Abraham, and do the works of Abraham, are called Abraham's children: in like manner, those who in their disposition and actions imitate GOD are called the children of GOD; and on the contrary, those that addict themselves to sin and impiety are counted of another race and descent, they resemble the devil and belong to him as the chief and head of that faction. SERM. XV.

By righteousness is here meant universal goodness and conformity to the law of GOD, in opposition to sin which is the transgression of that law.

By being manifest is meant that hereby good and bad men are really distinguished, so that every one that will examine his condition by this mark may know of which number he is, and to what party he belongs.

I come now to the main argument contained in the words, which is to give us a certain character and mark of distinction between a good and bad man; ἐν τούτῳ, "by this the children of GOD are manifest, "and the children of the devil: whosoever doth "not righteousness is not of GOD."

In the management of the following discourse I shall proceed in this method.

First, we will consider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man which is here laid down, "whosoever doth not righteousness is not "of GOD."

Secondly, I shall endeavour to shew that by this mark every man may, with due care and diligence, come to the knowledge of his spiritual state and condition.

SERM. XV.

dition. "By this the children of GOD are manifest, "and the children of the devil."

Thirdly, I shall enquire whence it comes to pass, that notwithstanding this so many persons are at so great uncertainty concerning their condition.

I. We will consider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man which is here in the text, "whosoever doth not righteousness is not "of GOD:" which implies likewise on the contrary, that "whosoever doth righteousness is of GOD." Now in the strictest sense of this phrase he only who lives in all the commandments of GOD blameless can be said to do righteousness; but in this sense "there is none that doth righteousness, no not "one;" consequently none could be the children of GOD; but the text supposes some to be so, and therefore by doing righteousness the apostle must necessarily be understood to mean something that is short of perfect and unsinning obedience. So that the question is, what doing of righteousness is sufficient to denominate a man a child of GOD, and to put him into a state of grace and favour with him.

And I do not intend nicely to state this matter. 'Tis not perhaps possible to be done, nothing being more difficult than to determine the very utmost bounds and limits of things, and to tell exactly and just to a point where the line of difference between virtue and vice, between the state of a good and a bad man, is to be placed: and if it could be done, it would be of no great use; for I take it to be no part of my business to tell men how many faults they may have, and how little goodness, and yet be the children of GOD: but rather to acquaint them what degrees

grees of holineſs and goodneſs are neceſſary to give men a clear and comfortable evidence of their good eſtate towards GOD, and then to perſuade them in order to their peace and aſſurance to endeavour after ſuch degrees. Wherefore to ſtate the buſineſs ſo far as is neceſſary to give men a ſufficient knowledge of their condition, I ſhall briefly conſider who they are that in the apoſtle's ſenſe may be ſaid to be doers of righteouſneſs, or not doers of it. And becauſe the apoſtle lays down the rule negatively, I ſhall therefore

SERM. XV.

In the firſt place, enquire who they are that in the apoſtle's ſenſe may be ſaid not to do righteouſneſs.

1. They that live in the general courſe of a wicked life, in the practice of great and known ſins, as injuſtice, intemperance, filthy and ſenſual luſts, profane neglect and contempt of GOD and religion, ſo that by the whole courſe and tenor of their actions it is plain beyond all denial that "there is no fear of "GOD before their eyes." Concerning theſe the caſe is ſo very evident that it ſeems too mild and gentle an expreſſion to call them not doers of righteouſneſs.

2. They who live in the habitual practice of any one known ſin, or in the neglect of any conſiderable part of their known duty. For any vicious habit denominates a man, and puts him into an evil ſtate.

3. They who are guilty of the ſingle act of a very heinous and notorious crime; as a deliberate act of blaſphemy, of murther, perjury, fraud or oppreſſion, or of any other crime of the like enormity. For though ordinarily one ſingle act of ſin doth not denominate one a bad man, when the general courſe of the man's life is contrary; yet the ſingle acts of ſome ſorts of ſins are ſo crying and heinous, and do

SERM. XV.

ſo ſtare every man's conſcience in the face, that they are juſtly eſteemed to be of equal malignity with vicious habits of an inferior kind; becauſe they do almoſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe a great depravation of mind, and a monſtrous alienation from GOD and goodneſs in the perſon that deliberately commits them. And they who are guilty in any of theſe three degrees now mentioned are moſt certainly not doers of righteouſneſs, and conſequently it is manifeſt that they are not the children of GOD.

In the ſecond place, I ſhall enquire who they are that in the apoſtle's ſenſe may be ſaid to do righteouſneſs. In ſhort, they who in the general courſe of their lives do keep the commandments of GOD. And thus the ſcripture generally expreſſeth this matter, by "keeping the commandments of GOD, and by having reſpect to all his commandments; by obedience "to the goſpel of CHRIST; by being holy in all manner of converſation; by abſtaining from all kind "of evil; by cleanſing our ſelves from all filthineſs "of the fleſh and ſpirit; and by practiſing holineſs "in the fear of GOD:" to which I ſhall add the deſcription which St. Luke gives us of the righteouſneſs of Zacharias and Elizabeth, Luke i. 6. "They "were both righteous before GOD, walking in all "the commandments and ordinances of the LORD "blameleſs." All which expreſſions do plainly ſignify the actual conformity of our lives and actions, in the general courſe and tenor of them, to the laws and commands of GOD. And this implies theſe two things; That "the tenor of our lives and actions be "agreeable to theſe laws of GOD:" and that "theſe "actions be done with a ſincere and upright mind:"

out of regard to God and another world, and not for low and temporal ends. SERM. XV

And I chuſe rather to deſcribe a righteous man by the actual conformity of the general courſe of his actions to the law of God, than (as ſome have done) by a ſincere deſire or reſolution of obedience. For a deſire may be ſincere for the time it laſts, and yet vaniſh before it comes to any real effect. And how innocently ſoever it was intended, it is certainly a great miſtake in divinity, and of a very dangerous conſequence to the ſouls of men, to affirm that a deſire of grace is grace; and conſequently by the ſame reaſon, that a deſire of obedience is obedience. A ſincere deſire and reſolution to be good is indeed a good beginning, and ought by all means to be cheriſhed and encouraged; but yet it is far enough from being the thing deſired, or from being accepted for it in the eſteem of God: for God never accepts the deſire for the deed, but where there is no poſſibility, no opportunity of doing the thing deſired; but if there be, and the thing be not done, there is no reaſon to imagine that the deſire in that caſe ſhould be accepted as if the thing were done. For inſtance, if a man give alms according to his ability, and would give more if he were able, in this caſe the deſire is accepted for the deed. And of this caſe it is and no other that the apoſtle ſpeaks, 2 Cor. viii. 12. "If there be "firſt a willing mind, it is accepted according to that "a man hath, and not according to that he hath "not." That is, God interprets and accepts the charity of men according to the largeneſs of their hearts, and not according to the ſtraitneſs of their fortunes: but it is a great miſtake to draw a general concluſion from

SERM. XV.

from this text, that in all cases GOD accepts the will for the deed. For though a man sincerely desire and resolve to reform his life (as I doubt not many men often do) but do it not when there is time and opportunity for it, these desires and resolutions are of no account with GOD; all this "righteousness is but as "the morning cloud, and as the early dew which "passeth away." Men are not apt to mistake so grosly in other matters. No man believes hunger to be meat, or thirst to be drink; and yet there is no doubt of the truth and sincerity of these natural desires. No man thinks that covetousness or a greedy desire to be rich is an estate, or that ambition or an insatiable desire of honour is really advancement: just so, and no otherwise, a desire to be good is righteousness. The apostle's caution a little before the text may fitly be applied to this purpose, "little children, "let no man deceive you: he that doth righteous-"ness is righteous, even as he is righteous." Not but that the best of men do sometimes fall through infirmity, and are betrayed by surprise, and born down by the violence of temptation; but if the general course of our actions be a doing of righteousness, the grace of the gospel, in and through the merits of our blessed SAVIOUR, doth accept of this imperfect but sincere obedience.

II. I shall endeavour to shew that by this mark every man may with due care and diligence, arrive at the certain knowledge of his spiritual state and condition. "By this the children of GOD are manifest, "and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not "righteousness is not of GOD." By which the apostle means that this is a real mark of difference betwixt good

good and bad men, and that whereby they very often manifeſt themſelves to others; eſpecially when the courſe of their lives is eminently pious and virtuous, or notoriouſly impious and wicked. But becauſe it doth not ſo much concern us curiouſly to enquire into, much leſs ſeverely to cenſure the ſtate of other men, I ſhall only conſider at preſent how far by this mark and character every man may make a certain judgment of his own good or bad condition.

1. By this character, as I have explained it, he that is a bad man may certainly know himſelf to be ſo, if he will but conſider his condition, and do not wilfully deceive and delude himſelf. As for thoſe who are vicious in the general courſe of their lives, or have been guilty of the act of ſome heinous or notorious ſin not yet repented of; their caſe is ſo plain for the moſt part, even to themſelves, that they can have no manner of doubt concerning it. Such men ſtand continually convicted and condemned by the ſentence of their own minds: and whenever they reflect upon themſelves (which they do as ſeldom as they can) they are a terror to themſelves, and full of amazement and fearful expectation of judgment. Not but that even in ſo plain a caſe many men do uſe great endeavours to cheat themſelves, and would be very glad to find out ways to reconcile a wicked life with the hopes of heaven, and to gain the favour, at leaſt the forgiveneſs of God, without repentance and amendment of their lives. And to this end they are willing to confeſs their ſins, and to undergo any penance that ſhall be impoſed upon them, that only excepted which only can do them good, I mean, real reformation. And when the prieſt hath abſolved them,

them, they would fain believe that God hath forgiven them too; however, they return to their former course, and being strongly addicted to their lusts, between stupidity and foolish hopes they at last come to this desperate resolution, to venture all upon the absolution of the priest, *Et valeat quantum valere potest*, let it have what effect it can; though I dare say that in their most serious thoughts they are horribly afraid it will do them no good.

And for those who are sinners of a lesser rate, and perhaps allow themselves only in one kind of vice, they likewise have reason to conclude themselves in a bad condition; especially if they consider that he who lives in the breach of any one commandment of God is guilty of all, because he contemns that authority which enacted the whole law. And 'tis easy for any man to discern the habit of any sin in himself; as when he frequently commits it, when he takes up no firm resolutions against it, when he useth no competent care to avoid the temptations to it, nor puts forth any vigorous endeavours to break off from it; or however, still continues in the practice of it. For the customary practice of any known sin is utterly inconsistent with sincere resolutions and endeavours against it, there being no greater evidence of the insincerity of resolutions and endeavours in any kind than still to go on to do contrary to them.

2. By this character likewise they that are sincerely good may generally be well assured of their good condition, and that they are the children of God. And there are but two things necessary to evidence this to them; that the general course and tenor of their actions be agreeable to the laws of God; and,

that

that they be sincere and upright in those actions. And both these every man may sufficiently know concerning himself; for if the laws of GOD be plain, and lye open to every man's understanding, then it is as easy for every man to know when he obeys GOD and keeps his commandments, as when he obeys the commands of his father or his prince, and when he keeps the known laws of the land. And no sensible or considerate man ever had any doubt of this kind, for if a man can know any thing he can certainly tell when he keeps or breaks any known law; so that all doubts of this nature are frivolous and idle pretences to cover mens faults, and such as they would be ashamed to alledge in any other case. SERM. XV.

And a good man may likewise know when he obeys GOD sincerely. Not but that men often deceive themselves with an opinion, or at least a groundless hope of their own sincerity; but if they will deal fairly with themselves, and use due care and diligence, there are very few cases (if any) wherein they may not know their own sincerity in any act of obedience to GOD: for what can a man know concerning himself if not the reality of his own intentions? If a man should in earnest tell me, that he doubted very much whether he had that friendship for me which he made profession of, and that he was afraid that his affection to me was not real and sincere, I confess I should doubt of it too; because I should certainly conclude that no man could know that matter so well as he himself.

And there is no doubt but whoever hath a hearty kindness for another, and a sincere desire to serve and please him, knows he has it. And accordingly

SERM. XV.

good and holy men in Scripture do every where with great confidence and assurance appeal to God concerning the integrity and sincerity of their hearts towards him. Job and David, Hezekiah and Nehemiah in the old testament; and in the new St. Paul for himself and Timothy, make this solemn profession of their sincerity, 2 Cor. i. 12. "our rejoicing is this, "the testimony of our conscience, that in simplici- "ty and godly sincerity we have our conversation in "the world." And I cannot call to mind so much as any one passage in scripture, from whence it can be collected that any good man ever doubted of his own sincerity. And to say the truth, it would not be modesty but impudence in any man to declare that he suspects himself of hypocrisy; good men have always abhorred the thoughts of it. "Ye have heard "of the patience of Job," and yet he could not bear to have his integrity questioned. It was a brave and generous speech of his, "till I die, I will not remove "my integrity from me.

And yet it hath so happened that this is become a very common doubt among religious people, and they have been so unreasonably cherished in it as to have it made a considerable evidence of a man's sincerity to doubt of it himself. It is indeed said in scripture, Jer. xvii. 9. "that the heart is deceitful "above all things, and desperately wicked, who can "know it?" which is true concerning our future intentions and actions: no man knowing how his mind may change hereafter. Little did Hazael think that ever he should do those things which the prophet foretold him. But though this be true in it self, yet 'tis not the meaning of that text. For the prophet in

SERM. XV.

in that chapter plainly makes use of this consideration of the falshood and deceitfulness of man's heart as an argument to take off the people of Israel from trusting in the arm of flesh, and in those promises which were made to them of foreign assistance from Egypt: because men may pretend fair and yet deceive those that rely upon them, for "the heart of man is "deceitful and desperately wicked," and none but God knows whether mens inward intentions be answerable to their outward professions; "for he search-"eth the heart and trieth the reins." And this I verily believe is all that the prophet here intends, that there is a great deal of fraud and deceit in the hearts of bad men, so that no man can rely upon their promises and professions; but God knows the hearts of all men. But now because God alone knows the hearts of all men and the sincerity of their intentions towards one another, doth it from hence follow that it is a thing either impossible or very difficult for any man to know the sincerity of his own present intentions and actions? To make any such conclusions were to "condemn the generation of God's "children," those holy and excellent men in scripture, Job, and David, and Hezekiah, and St. Paul, who do frequently appeal to God concerning their own integrity. And surely when the apostle saith, "no man knows the things of a man, but the spirit "of a man which is in him," he plainly supposes that every man is conscious to the motions and intentions of his own mind. I have insisted the longer upon this that I might from the very foundation destroy an imagination, which is not only untrue in it self, but has likewise been a very great hin-

SERM. XV.

hindrance to the peace and comfort of many good men.

III. Let us enquire whence it comes to pass that notwithstanding this so many persons are at so great uncertainty about their spiritual condition. For the clearing of this matter we will distinctly consider these three things. First, the grounds of the false hopes and confidence of men really bad concerning their good condition. Secondly, the causeless doubts and jealousies of men really good concerning their bad condition. And thirdly, the just causes of doubting in others. As for the troubles and fears of men who are notoriously bad and live in the practice of known vices, these do not fall under our consideration: if they be troubled about their condition, it is no more than what they ought to be; and if they be only doubtful of it, it is less than they ought to be. To persons in this condition there is only counsel to be given to leave their sins and become better, but no comfort to be administred to them till first they have followed that counsel: for till they reform, if they think themselves to be in a bad condition, they think just as they ought and as there is great reason, and no body should go about to persuade them otherwise.

First then, we will consider the grounds of the false hopes and confidence of men really bad concerning their good condition. I do not now mean the worst of men, but such as make some shew and appearance of goodness. It is very unpleasing to men to fall under the hard opinion and censure of others, but the most grievous thing in the world for a man to be condemned by himself; and therefore it is no wonder

der that men uſe all manner of ſhifts to avoid ſo great an inconvenience as is the ill opinion of a man's ſelf concerning himſelf and his own condition.

Some therefore rely upon the profeſſion of the Chriſtian faith, and their being baptized into it. But this is ſo far from being any exemption from a good life, that it is the greateſt and moſt ſolemn obligation to it. Doſt thou believe the doctrine of the goſpel? thou of all men art inexcuſable if thou alloweſt thy ſelf in ungodlineſs and worldly luſts.

Others truſt to their external devotion, they frequent the church and ſerve God conſtantly, they pray to him, and hear his word, and receive the bleſſed ſacrament: but let us not deceive our ſelves, God is not mocked. All this is ſo far from making amends for the impiety of our lives, that on the contrary the impiety of our lives ſpoils all the acceptance of our devotions. "He that turneth away "his ear from hearing the law (that is, from obeying "it) even his prayer ſhall be an abomination."

Others who are ſenſible they are very bad depend very much upon their repentance, eſpecially if they ſet ſolemn times apart for it. And there is no doubt but that a ſincere repentance will put a man into a good condition: but then it is to be conſidered that no repentance is ſincere but that which produceth a real change and reformation in our lives. For we have not repented to purpoſe if we return again to our ſins. It is well thou art in ſome meaſure ſenſible of thy miſcarriage, but thou art never ſafe till thou haſt forſaken thy ſins; thy eſtate and condition towards God is not changed, till thou haſt really altered thy ſelf and the courſe of thy life.

Others

Others satisfy themselves with the exercise of some particular graces and virtues, justice, and liberality, and charity. And is it not a thousand pities that thy life is not all of a piece, and that all the other parts of it are not answerable to these, that thou shouldest lose the reward of so much real goodness out of thy fondness to any one vice or lust, that when "thou "art not far from the kingdom of GOD" for lack of one or two things more thou shouldest fall short of it? Hast thou never heard what the scripture saith, that "he who offends in one point is a transgressor of the "whole law?" To make a man a good man all parts of goodness must concur, but any one way of wickedness is sufficient to denominate a man bad.

Lastly, Some who are very careful of their outward carriage and conversation, but yet are conscious to themselves of great secret faults and vices, when they can find no comfort from themselves and the testimony of their own consciences, are apt to comfort themselves in the good opinion which perhaps others have of them. But if we know our selves to be bad and "our own hearts do condemn us," it is not the good opinion of others concerning us which can either alter or better our condition. They may have reason for their charity, and yet thou none for thy confidence. Trust no body concerning thy self rather than thy self, because no body can know thee so well as thou mayest know thy self.

These, and such as these, are the hopes of the hypocrite, which Job elegantly compares to the spiders web, finely and artificially wrought but miserably thin and weak; so that we our selves may see through them, and if we lay the least stress upon them they will

will break. They are but pleasant dreams and delusions, which whenever we are awakened to a serious consideration of our condition by the apprehensions of approaching death and judgment, will presently vanish and disappear; so the same holy man tells us, Job xxvii. 8. "What is the hope of the hypocrite, "when GOD taketh away his soul?"

Secondly, we will consider in the next place the causeless doubts and jealousies of men really good, concerning their bad condition. For as some are prone beyond all reason to delude themselves with vain hopes of their good condition, so others are apt as unreasonably to torment themselves with groundless fears and jealousies that their estate is bad. And of these doubts there are several occasions, the chief whereof I shall mention, by which we may judge of the rest that are of the like nature.

1. Some are afraid that they are reprobated from all eternity, and therefore they cannot be the children of GOD. This is so unreasonable, that if it were not a real cause of trouble to some persons it did not deserve to be considered. For no man that sincerely endeavours to please GOD and to keep his commandments hath from scripture the least ground to suspect any latent or secret decree of GOD against him that shall work his ruin. But whatever the decrees of GOD be concerning the eternal state of men, since they are secret to us they can certainly be no rule either of our duty or comfort. And no man hath reason to think himself rejected of GOD, either from eternity, or in time, that does not find the marks of reprobation in himself, I mean an evil heart and life. By this indeed a man may know that he is

out

SERM. XV.

out of God's favour for the present, but he hath no reason at all from hence to conclude that God hath from all eternity and for ever cast him off. That God calls him to repentance, and affords to him the space and means of it, is a much plainer sign that God is willing and ready to have mercy on him than any thing else is, or can be, that God hath utterly cast him off. And therefore for men to judge of their condition by the decrees of God which are hid from us, and not by his word which is "near us "and in our hearts," is as if a man wandring in the wide sea, in a dark night when the heaven is all clouded about, should yet resolve to steer his course by the stars which he cannot see, but only guess at, and neglect the compass, which is at hand and would afford him a much better and more certain direction. This therefore is to be rejected as a fond and groundless imagination, and which ought to trouble no body, because no body doth nor can know any thing concerning it. Moses hath long since very well determined this matter, Deut. xxix. 29. "Secret things belong "unto the Lord our God, but these things which "are revealed, belong unto us and our children for "ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

2. Good men are conscious to themselves of many frailties and imperfections, and therefore they are afraid of their condition. But God considers the infirmities of our present state, and expects no other obedience from us in order to our acceptance with him, but what this state of imperfection is capable of: and provided the sincere endeavour and general course of our lives be to please him and keep his commandments, the terms of the gospel are so merciful, that

our

our frailties ſhall not be imputed to us, ſo as to affect our main ſtate, and to make us ceaſe to be the children of GOD. And though we may be guilty of many errors and ſecret ſins, which eſcape our notice and obſervation, yet it is not impoſſible for us to exerciſe ſuch a repentance for theſe as will be available for their pardon. For we have to deal with a merciful GOD, who is pleaſed to accept of ſuch an obedience and of ſuch a repentance as we are capable of performing. Now there is a great difference between thoſe ſins which require a particular repentance before we can hope for the pardon of them, (as all great and deliberate and preſumptuous ſins do, which are never committed without our knowledge, and are ſo far from ſlipping out of our memory that they are continually flying in our faces, and we cannot forget them if we would) and ſins of infirmity occaſioned by ſurpriſe and violence of temptation, through ignorance or inadvertency: for a general repentance, ſuch as we every day exerciſe in our devotions and prayers to GOD, may ſuffice for theſe. I ſpeak not this to hinder any from a more particular repentance of all their known failings, the more particular the better; but to remove the groundleſs fears and jealouſies of men about their main ſtate and condition. And if any aſk how I know that a general repentance will ſuffice for theſe kind of ſins? I anſwer, becauſe more than this in many caſes is impoſſible; ſo that either we muſt reſt ſatisfied that GOD will forgive them upon theſe terms, or conclude that they ſhall not be forgiven at all, which is contrary to the whole tenor of the ſcriptures: I ſay, in many caſes, more than this is impoſſible, becauſe ſins of ignorance, and thoſe

common errors and frailties of human life, which David calls secret sins, are not particularly known to us when they are committed, and consequently it is impossible that we should particularly repent of them. And therefore in this case there can be no doubt but that God doth accept of a general repentance, as he did from David when he made that humble confession and prayer to him, Psal. xix. 12. "Who can "understand his errors? cleanse thou me from se-"cret sins."

3. They are afraid their obedience is not sincere, because it proceeds many times from fear and not always out of pure love to God. For answer to this: It is plain from scripture that God propounds to men several motives and arguments to obedience, some proper to work upon their fear, as the threatnings of punishment; some upon their hope, as the promises of blessing and reward; others upon their love, as the mercies and forgiveness of God. From whence it is evident he intended they should all work upon us. And accordingly the scripture gives us instances in each kind. "Noah moved with fear obeyed God in pre-"paring an ark. Moses had respect unto the recom-"pence of reward: Mary Magdalen loved much." And as it is hard to say, so it is not necessary to determine, just how much influence and no more each of these hath upon us: it is very well if men be reclaimed from their sins and made good by the joint force of all the considerations which God offers to us. To be sure love is the noblest and most generous principle of obedience, but fear commonly takes the first and fastest hold of us, and in times of violent temptation is perhaps the best argument to keep, even the best of men, within the bounds of their duty. 4. A-

4. Another cauſe of doubting in good men is, from a ſenſe of their imperfect performance of the duties of religion, and of the abatement of their affections towards God at ſome times. They have many wandring thoughts in prayer and other exerciſes of devotion, and they cannot for their lives keep their minds continually intent on what they are about. This we ſhould ſtrive againſt as much as we can, and that is the utmoſt we can do; but to cure this wholly is impoſſible, the infirmity of our nature and the frame of our minds will not admit of it: and therefore no man ought to queſtion his ſincerity, becauſe he cannot do that which is impoſſible for men to do.

And then for the abatement of our affections to God and religion at ſome times, this naturally proceeds from the inconſtancy of men's tempers, by reaſon of which it is not poſſible that the beſt of men ſhould be able always to maintain and keep up the ſame degree of zeal and fervour towards God. But our comfort is, that God doth not meaſure mens ſincerity by the tides of their affections, but by the conſtant bent of their reſolutions and the general tenor of their lives and actions.

5. Another cauſe of theſe doubts is, that men expect more than ordinary and reaſonable aſſurance of their good condition; ſome particular revelation from God, an extraordinary impreſſion upon their minds to that purpoſe, which they think the ſcripture means by the teſtimony and ſeal and earneſt of the ſpirit. God may give this when and to whom he pleaſes, but I do not find he hath any where promiſed it. And all that the ſcripture means by thoſe phraſes of the teſtimony, and ſeal and earneſt of the ſpirit, is

to my apprehension no more but this, that the holy Spirit, which GOD bestowed upon Christians in so powerful and sensible a manner, was a seal and earnest of their resurrection to eternal life, according to that plain text, Rom. viii. 11. "If the spirit of him that "raised up JESUS from the dead dwell in you, he "that raised up CHRIST from the dead shall also "quicken your mortal bodies, by his spirit that dwell-"eth in you." But then, who they are that have the spirit of GOD, is only to be known by the real fruits and effects of it. If we be "led by the spirit, "and walk in the spirit, and do not fulfil the lusts "of the flesh, then the spirit of GOD dwelleth in us." But this is very far from an immediate and extraordinary revelation from the spirit of GOD to the minds of good men telling them in particular that they are the children of GOD. I know not what peculiar favour GOD may shew to some, but I know no such thing, nor ever yet met with any wise and good man that did affirm it of himself: and I fear that in most of those who pretend to it, it is either meer fancy or gross delusion.

6. As for the case of melancholy it is not a reasonable case, and therefore doth not fall under any certain rules and directions. They who are under the power of it are seldom fit to take that counsel which alone is fit to be given them, and that is, not to believe themselves concerning themselves, but to trust the judgment of others rather than their own apprehensions. In other cases every man knows himself best, but a melancholy man is most in the dark as to himself. This cause of trouble and doubting is very much to be pitied, but hard to be removed, unless by

phyſick, or by time, or by chance. One may happen to ſay ſomething that may hit the humour of a melancholy man, and ſatisfy him for the preſent; but reaſon muſt needs ſignify very little to thoſe perſons, the nature of whoſe diſtemper it is to turn every thing that can be ſaid for their comfort into objections againſt themſelves.

Thirdly, but beſides thoſe who miſtake their condition either by preſuming it to be better, or fearing it to be worſe than it is, there are likewiſe others who upon good grounds are doubtful of their condition, and have reaſon to be afraid of it: thoſe I mean, who have ſome beginnings of goodneſs which yet are very imperfect. They have good reſolutions and do many things well, but they often fall, and are frequently pulled back by thoſe evil inclinations and habits which are yet in a great meaſure unſubdued in them. Theſe I cannot liken better than to the borderers between two countries, who live in the marches and confines of two powerful kingdoms, both which have a great influence upon them, ſo that it is hard to ſay whoſe ſubjects they are, and to which prince they belong: thus it is with many in religion, they have pious inclinations and have made ſome fair attempts towards goodneſs, they have begun to refrain from ſin and to reſiſt the occaſions and temptations to it; but ever and anon they are maſtered by their old luſts, and carried off from their beſt reſolutions; and perhaps upon a little conſideration they repent and recover themſelves again, and after a while are again entangled and overcome.

Now the caſe of theſe perſons is really doubtful both to themſelves and others. And the proper direction

SERM. XV.

rection to be given them in order to their peace and settlement, is by all means to encourage them to go on and fortify their good resolutions; to be more vigilant and watchful over themselves, to strive against sin and to resist it with all their might. And according to the success of their endeavours in this conflict, the evidence of their good condition will every day clear up and become more manifest; the more we grow in grace, and the seldomer we fall into sin, and the more even and constant our obedience to GOD is, so much the greater and fuller satisfaction we shall have of our good estate towards GOD: for "the path "of the just is as the shining light, which shines "more and more unto the perfect day:" And "the "work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect "of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."

I shall only make two or three inferences from what hath been discoursed upon this argument, and so conclude.

1. From hence we learn the great danger of sins of omission as well as commission; "whosoever doth "not righteousness is not of GOD." The meer neglect of any of the great duties of religion, of piety towards GOD, and of kindness and charity to men, though we be free from the commission of great sins, is enough to cast us out of the favour of GOD and to shut us for ever out of his kingdom. "I was hun-"gry, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye "gave me no drink; sick and in prison, and ye "visited me not; therefore depart ye cursed."

2. It is evident from what hath been said, that nothing can be vainer than for men to live in any course of sin and impiety, and yet to pretend to be the children

children of GOD, and to hope for eternal life. The children of GOD will do the works of GOD, and whoever hopes to enjoy him hereafter, will endeavour to be like him here; "every man that hath his hope "in him, purifies himself even as he is pure." SERM. XV.

3. You see what is the great mark and character of a man's good or bad condition; "whosoever doth "righteousness is of GOD, and whosoever doth not "righteousness is not of GOD." Here is a plain and sensible evidence by which every man, that will deal honestly with himself, may certainly know his own condition; and then according as he finds it to be, may take comfort in it, or make haste out of it. And we need not ascend into heaven, nor go down into the deep, to search out the secret counsels and decrees of GOD; there needs no anxious enquiry whether we be of the number of GOD's elect: if we daily mortify our lusts and grow in goodness, and take care to add to our faith and knowledge, temperance and patience and charity and all other Christian graces and virtues, we certainly take the best course in the world to "make our calling and election sure." And without this it is impossible that we should have any comfortable and well-grounded assurance of our good condition. This one mark of doing righteousness is that into which all other signs and characters, which are in scripture given of a good man, are finally resolved; and this answers all those various phrases which some men would make to be so many several and distinct marks of a child of GOD; as whether we have the true knowledge of GOD and divine illumination, for "hereby we know that we know him "if we keep his commandments:" whether we sincerely

SERM. XV.

cerely love GOD, for "this is the love of GOD, that "we keep his commandments: and whether GOD loves us, for "the righteous LORD loveth righteousness and his countenance will behold the upright:" whether we be regenerate and born of GOD, for "whosoever is born of GOD sinneth not:" whether we have "the spirit of GOD witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of GOD," for "as many as have the spirit of GOD are led by the spirit," and "by the spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh:" whether we belong to CHRIST, and have an interest in him or not, for "they that are CHRIST's have crucified the "flesh with the affections and lusts thereof:" in a word, whether the promise of heaven and eternal life belong to us, for "without holiness no man shall "see the LORD, but if we have our fruit unto ho-"liness, the end will be everlasting life." So that you see at last, the scripture brings all this to one mark, holiness and obedience to the laws of GOD, or a vicious and wicked life; "in this the children "of GOD are manifest, and the children of the devil; "whosoever doth not righteousness is not of GOD."

Let us then deal impartially with our selves, and bring our lives and actions to this trial, and never be at rest till the matter be brought to some issue, and we have made a deliberate judgment of our condition, whether we be the children of GOD or not: and if upon a full and fair examination our consciences give us this testimony, that by the grace of GOD we have "denied ungodliness and worldly lusts," and have "lived soberly, and righteously, and godly in "this present world," we may take joy and comfort in it; for "if our heart condemn us not, then have

"we

" we confidence towards GOD :" but if upon the ſearch and trial of our ways our caſe appear clearly to be otherwiſe, or if we have juſt cauſe to doubt of it, let us not venture to continue one moment longer in ſo uncertain and dangerous a condition. And if we deſire to know the way of peace the ſcripture hath ſet it plainly before us, " waſh ye, make ye clean, " put away the evil of your doings from before mine " eyes, ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well:" " come " now and let us reaſon together, ſaith the LORD, " though your ſins be as ſcarlet, they ſhall be as white " as ſnow:" " let the wicked forſake his way, and " the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him re- " turn unto the LORD, and he will have mercy up- " on him, and to our GOD, for he will abundantly " pardon." Though our caſe be very bad, yet it is not deſperate; " this is a faithful ſaying, and worthy " of all men to be embraced, that JESUS CHRIST " came into the world to ſave ſinners:" And he is ſtill willing to ſave us, if we be but willing to leave our ſins and to ſerve him in holineſs and righteouſneſs the remaining part of our lives. We may yet be " turned from darkneſs to light, and from the " power of Satan unto GOD :" we who have ventured ſo long upon the brink of ruin, may yet by the infinite mercies of GOD, and by the power of his grace, be reſcued from the baſe and miſerable ſlavery of the devil and our luſts " into the glorious liber- " ty of the ſons of GOD."

And thus I have endeavoured, with all the plainneſs I could, to repreſent every man to himſelf, and to let him clearly ſee what his condition is towards GOD, and how the caſe of his ſoul and of his eternal

happineſs ſtands. And I do verily believe that what I have ſaid in this matter is the truth of GOD, to which we ought all gladly to yield and render up our ſelves. For " great is truth, and mighty above all " things:" ſhe is faithful and impartial in her counſels, and though ſhe be not always welcome, yet 'tis always wiſe to hearken to her, for in great kindneſs and charity ſhe lets men know their condition and the danger of it, that they may take care to prevent it: " with her is no accepting of perſons, and in her " judgment there is no unrighteouſneſs." I will conclude all with that excellent advice of a * heathen philoſopher, " make it no longer a matter of diſpute " what are the marks and ſigns of a good man, but " immediately ſet about it, and endeavour to become " ſuch an one."

*Antonin. lib. 10.

SERMON XVI.

Of the joy which is in heaven at the repentance of a ſinner.

LUKE xv. 7.

I ſay unto you, that likewiſe joy ſhall be in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt perſons which need no repentance.

SERM. XVI.

AFTER many attempts made in vain to reclaim ſinners from their evil ways and to bring them to the wiſdom of the juſt, it is hard for us, who are the meſſengers of GOD to men, not to ſit down in

in deſpondence, and at laſt quite to deſpair of doing good upon them. But when I conſider the infinite patience of GOD with ſinners, and how long his ſpirit ſtrives with them, why ſhould we, we who are ſinners our ſelves, think much to bear with ſinners, and patiently to contend with their obſtinacy and perverſeneſs? When I conſider that our bleſſed SAVIOUR, the great preacher and pattern of righteouſneſs, did not give over the worſt of men nor deſpair of their recovery: this methinks ſhould make us, who are ambaſſadors for CHRIST, unwearied in beſeeching men in his ſtead to be reconciled to GOD.

And of this we have a famous inſtance in this chapter: the publicans and ſinners, as they had done ſeveral times before, came to hear our SAVIOUR: he treated them very kindly, and converſed familiarly with them; at this the Phariſees were diſpleaſed and murmured, and this unreaſonable murmuring of theirs gave occaſion to the three parables in this chapter.

In which our SAVIOUR does at once anſwer the objection of the Phariſees, and give all poſſible encouragement to the repentance of theſe great ſinners. He anſwers the Phariſees by letting them plainly ſee that he was about the beſt work in the world, the moſt acceptable to GOD, and matter of greateſt joy to all the heavenly inhabitants. Inſtead of a ſevere reproof of their uncharitableneſs he offers that calmly to their conſideration, which ought in all reaſon to convince them that he was no ways to blame for this familiar converſation of his with ſinners, having no other deſign upon them but to reclaim them from their vices, and to make them fit company for the beſt of men; that he was a ſpiritual

SERM. XVI.

physician, and therefore his proper work and employment lay among his patients. And then instead of terrifying these sinners, who seemed to come with a good mind to be instructed by him, he gently insinuates the most winning arguments and the greatest encouragement to repentance; by shewing how ready GOD was, after all their sins and provocations, to receive them to his grace and favour, provided they did sincerely repent and betake themselves to a better course: And not only so, but that the repentance of a sinner is a great joy to the great King of the world, and to all that holy and heavenly host that attend upon him.

From which method of our SAVIOUR in treating so great sinners so gently, I cannot but make this observation, for my own use as well as for others; that it is good to give, even the greatest of sinners, all the encouragement we can to repentance; and though men have been never so bad, yet if they have but this one good quality left in them, that they are patient to be instructed, and content to hear good counsel, we should use them kindly and endeavour to recover them by the fairest means; not so much upbraiding them for their having been bad, as encouraging them to become better.

To this purpose our SAVIOUR uttered three parables; of "the recovery of a lost sheep;" of "finding "a lost piece of money;" of "the return of a prodi- "gal son to his father;" and though they all aim at the same scope and design, yet our SAVIOUR useth this variety, not only to convey the same thing to several capacities in a more acceptable manner, one similitude happening to hit one person and another

another,

another, but likewiſe to inculcate ſo weighty a matter the more upon his hearers, and to fix it more deeply in their minds.

The words which I have read are the moral or application of the firſt parable, concerning a man who had an hundred ſheep, and having loſt one leaves the ninety and nine to go to ſeek that which was loſt; and having found it, with great joy brings it home. By which our SAVIOUR gives us to underſtand, what joy GOD and the bleſſed ſpirits above take in the converſion of a ſinner. "I ſay unto you, "that likewiſe joy ſhall be in heaven over one ſinner "that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt "perſons which need no repentance." Than which nothing could have been more proper, both to ſilence the uncharitable murmuring of the Phariſees againſt our SAVIOUR for converſing with publicans and ſinners to ſo good an end, and likewiſe to encourage ſinners to repent: For why ſhould the Phariſees be diſpleaſed at that which was ſo great a pleaſure to GOD and the holy angels: and what greater encouragement to repentance than this, that GOD is not only willing to receive the returning ſinner, but that the news of his repentance is entertained in heaven with ſo much joy, that if it be poſſible for the bleſſed inhabitants of that place to have any thing added to their happineſs, this will be a new acceſſion to it?

There are three things in the words which require a very careful explication.

1. How we are to underſtand the joy that is in heaven at the converſion of a ſinner?

2. Who are here meant by the juſt perſons that need no repentance?

3. With

3. With what reaſon it is here ſaid, that there is "more joy in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, "than over ninety and nine juſt perſons who need "no repentance."

There is ſomething of difficulty in each of theſe, which deſerves our heedful and attentive conſideration.

I. How we are to underſtand the joy that is in heaven at the repentance of a ſinner? And this (as indeed this whole paſſage of our SAVIOUR's) we are not to underſtand too ſtrictly and rigorouſly, but as ſpoken in a great meaſure after the manner of men, and by way of accommodation to our capacity, ſo far as the perſons here ſpoken of are capable of any addition to their joy and happineſs.

As it refers to GOD, it ſeems very inconſiſtent with the happineſs and perfection of the divine nature to ſuppoſe him really capable of joy, any more than of grief, or any other paſſion: becauſe this would be to imagine ſome new acceſſion to his pleaſure and happineſs, which being always infinite can never have any thing added to it. And therefore we are to underſtand this, as it relates to GOD, in the ſame manner as we do infinite other paſſages of ſcripture where human paſſions are aſcribed to him, to be ſpoken by way of condeſcenſion and after the language and manner of the ſons of men; and to ſignify only thus much to us, that the converſion of a ſinner is a thing highly pleaſing and acceptable to GOD.

As it refers to angels and other bleſſed ſpirits, I ſee no inconvenience why it may not be underſtood more ſtrictly and literally; that they conceive a new joy at the news of a ſinner's repentance, and find a freſh

pleaſure and delight ſpringing up in their minds whenever they hear the joyful tidings of a ſinner reſcued from the ſlavery of the devil and the danger of eternal damnation; of a new member added to the kingdom of GOD, that ſhall be a companion and a ſharer with them in that bleſſedneſs which they enjoy. There ſeems to me to be nothing in this repugnant to the nature and happineſs of bleſſed ſpirits in another world. For it is certain, that there are degrees of happineſs among the bleſſed: from whence it neceſſarily follows, that ſome of them may be happier than they are. And it is very probable, ſince the happineſs of angels and good men is but finite, that thoſe who are moſt happy do continually receive new additions to their bleſſedneſs; and that their felicity is never at a ſtand but perpetually growing and improving to all eternity; and that as their knowledge and love do encreaſe, ſo likewiſe the capacity and cauſes of their happineſs are ſtill more and more enlarged and augmented: So that it is reaſonable enough to ſuppoſe that there is really joy, among the angels and ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, over every ſinner that repenteth.

II. Who are here meant by the juſt perſons who need no repentance? That our SAVIOUR in this expreſſion gives ſome glance and reflection upon the Phariſees (who prided themſelves in their own righteouſneſs, and inſtead of confeſſing their ſins to GOD ſtood upon their own juſtification, as if they needed no repentance) is very probable: becauſe this parable was deſigned to anſwer their murmurings againſt him, for converſing with publicans and ſinners, and by the by to give a check to thoſe who were ſo conceited of

their

their own righteouſneſs as if they had no need of repentance. And this is very ſuitable to what our SAVIOUR elſewhere ſays to them upon the like occaſion, that "the whole have no need of the phyſician, but "the ſick;" that "he came not to call the righte-"ous, but the ſinners to repentance." But yet though our SAVIOUR expreſſeth himſelf ſo as that the Phariſees might with reaſon enough apply it to themſelves, that there was more joy in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine of them, who were ſo conceited of their own righteouſneſs that they thought they had no need of repentance (for indeed our SAVIOUR delivers himſelf ſo, as to leave room for ſuch a ſevere application) yet I think there is but little doubt to be made but that he intended ſomething farther; and that ſuppoſing the Phariſees were as juſt as they pretended, and were really righteous men, ſo as to ſtand in no need of ſuch a repentance as great ſinners do, yet our SAVIOUR affirms, "there "was more joy in heaven over one penitent ſin-"ner than over ninety and nine ſuch juſt perſons."

But are there any perſons in the world ſo juſt, as abſolutely to ſtand in need of no repentance? No, there was never any ſuch perſon in the world, him only excepted who ſaid this, our bleſſed SAVIOUR, "who had no ſin, neither was guile found in his "mouth." And therefore this phraſe of needing no repentance is to be underſtood in a qualified ſenſe, and with ſome allowance; otherwiſe our bleſſed SAVIOUR had ſuppoſed a caſe which never was, of a great number of perfectly righteous men. And our SAVIOUR's meaning in this is ſufficiently explained in the laſt parable of this chapter, concerning the prodigal

prodigal son; where the prodigal son is the "sinner "that repented;" and his elder brother, who had always observed and obeyed his father, he is the "just person "who needed no repentance." So that by him our SAVIOUR plainly designs those, who being religiously educated and brought up in the fear of GOD, had never broke out into any extravagant and vicious course of life, and so in some sense had no need of repentance, that is, of changing the whole course of their lives, as the prodigal son had. Not but that the best of men are guilty of many faults and infirmities, which they have too much cause to repent of, as our SAVIOUR sufficiently intimates in that parable: For certainly it was no small infirmity in the elder brother to be so envious, and to take so heinously the joyful welcome and entertainment which his prodigal brother at his return found from his father: but yet this single fault and sudden surprise of passion, considering the constant duty which he had paid to his father throughout the course of his life, did not make him such a sinner as to need such a repentance as his brother did, which consisted in a perfect change of the whole course of his life. And of such just persons as these, and of such a repentance as this, it seems very plain that our SAVIOUR intended this discourse. SERM. XVI.

III. But the main difficulty of all is, with what reason it is here said that "there is more joy in hea-"ven over one sinner that repenteth, than over nine-"ty and nine just persons which need no repentance?" Is it not better not to offend, than to sin and repent? Is not innocence better than amendment, and the wisdom of prevention to be preferred before that of remedy? Is it worth the while to do amiss to make

SERM. XVI.

way for repentance? and is not this almoſt like "ſinning that grace may abound?" And if repentance be not better than righteouſneſs, why is there more joy in heaven over the penitent than over the righteous; nay over one penitent ſinner, than over ninety and nine juſt perſons? Do not the bleſſed always rejoice moſt in that which is really beſt? Here is the difficulty, and it requires ſome care and conſideration clearly to remove it. In order to which be pleaſed to conſider theſe three things, which I think to be very material to the clearing of it.

1. That the ſame thing conſidered in ſeveral reſpects, may in ſome reſpects have the advantage of another thing, and for thoſe reaſons be preferred before it, and yet not have the advantage of it abſolutely and in all reſpects. Moral compariſons are not to be exacted to a mathematical ſtrictneſs and rigour. To this purpoſe I have obſerved in a former diſcourſe, that it was long ſince judiciouſly noted by Ariſtotle, "that moral and proverbial ſpeeches are "not to be taken too ſtrictly, as if they were univer-"ſally true, and in all caſes:" It is ſufficient if they be true for the moſt part, and in ſeveral reſpects which are very conſiderable. And of this nature are moſt of the proverbs of Solomon, and whoſoever ſhall go about to make out the truth of them in all caſes, does in my opinion take a very hard taſk upon himſelf. But which is nearer to my purpoſe, our SAVIOUR himſelf in the chapter before my text, and in the moral application of a parable too, (namely that of the unjuſt ſteward) uſeth a proverbial ſpeech juſt in the ſame manner; "the children of this world are "in their generation wiſer than the children of light:"

which

which is only a wiſe obſervation that is generally true and in many reſpects, but not abſolutely and univerſally. For ſome men have been as wiſe and diligent for the glory of GOD and intereſt of their ſouls, as ever any man was for this world, and for the advancement of his temporal intereſt. Of the like nature is this ſaying uſed by our SAVIOUR, probably taken (as our SAVIOUR did many other proverbial ſpeeches) from the Jews, and applied to his own purpoſe. For there are ſeveral ſayings of the Jewiſh maſters much to this purpoſe: As, "great is the dignity of penitents; great is the virtue of them that "repent, ſo that no creature may ſtand in their rank "and order." And again, "the righteous may not "ſtand in the ſame place with thoſe that have repented." Theſe I confeſs were very high ſayings, but yet very well deſigned for the encouragement of repentance. And they are not without good reaſon, as will appear if we conſider theſe two things. SERM. XVI.

Firſt, that the greater the difficulty of virtue is, ſo much the greater is the praiſe and commendation of it: and not only we our ſelves take the more joy and comfort in it, but it is more admirable and delightful to others. Now it cannot be denied to be much more difficult to break off a vicious habit, than to go on in a good way which we have been trained up in, and always accuſtomed to. Thoſe that have been well educated have great cauſe to thank GOD, and to acknowledge the care of their parents and teachers: for piety and goodneſs are almoſt infinitely eaſier to ſuch perſons, than to thoſe who have wanted this advantage. It is happy for them they never taſted of unlawful pleaſures; if they had, they would

possibly have drank as deep as others: it is well they were never entangled in a sinful course, nor enslaved to vicious habits, nor "hardened through the deceit-"fulness of sin;" if they had, they might possibly never have been recovered out of the snare of the devil. By the happiness of a good education, and the merciful providence of God, a great part of many mens virtue consists in their ignorance of vice, and their being kept out of the way of great and dangerous temptations; rather in the good customs they have been bred up to, than in the deliberate choice of their wills; and rather in the happy preventions of evil, than in their resolute constancy in that which is good. And God who knows what is in man, and sees to the bottom of every man's temper and inclination, knows how far this man would have fallen had he had the temptations of other men; and how irrecoverably perhaps he should have been plunged in an evil course, had he once entred upon it. So that repentance is a very great thing; and though it be the most just, and fit, and reasonable thing in the world; yet for all that it deserves great commendation, because it is for the most part so very hard and difficult. And therefore though, absolutely speaking, innocence is better than repentance, yet, as the circumstances may be, the virtue of some penitents may be greater than of many just and righteous persons.

Secondly, there is this consideration farther to recommend repentance, that they who are reclaimed from a wicked course are many times more thoroughly and zealously good afterwards: their trouble and remorse for their sins does quicken and spur them on

in

in the ways of virtue and goodneſs, and a lively ſenſe of their paſt errors is apt to make them more careful and conſcientious of their duty, more tender and fearful of offending GOD, and deſirous, if it were poſſible, to redeem their former miſcarriages by their good behaviour for the future. Their love to GOD is uſually more vehement and burns with a brighter flame, "for to whomſoever much is forgiven they "will love much." And they are commonly more zealous for the converſion of others, as being more ſenſible of the danger ſinners are in and more apt to commiſerate their caſe, remembring that it was once their own condition, and with what difficulty they were reſcued from ſo great a danger. And for the moſt part great penitents are more free from pride and contempt of others, the conſideration of what themſelves once were being enough to keep them humble all their days. So that penitents are many times more throughly and perfectly good, and after their recovery do in ſeveral reſpects outſtrip and excel thoſe who were never engaged in a vicious courſe of life: as a broken bone that is well ſet is ſometimes ſtronger than it was before. SERM. XVI.

2. It will conduce alſo very much to the extenuating of this difficulty, to conſider that our SAVIOUR does not here compare repentance with abſolute innocence and perfect righteouſneſs, but with the imperfect obedience of good men, who are guilty of many ſins and infirmities; but yet upon account of the general courſe and tenor of their lives are by the mercy and favour of the goſpel eſteemed juſt and righteous perſons; and, for the merits and perfect obedience of our bleſſed SAVIOUR, ſo accepted by GOD. Now this

SERM. XVI.

this alters the case very much, and brings the penitent and this sort of righteous persons much nearer to one another: so that in comparing them together, the true penitent may in some cases, and in some respects, have the advantage of the righteous, and deserve upon some accounts to be preferred before him.

3. Which is principally to be considered for the full clearing of this difficulty; this passage of our SAVIOUR is to be understood as spoken very much after the manner of men, and suitably to the nature of human passions, and the usual occasions of moving them. We are apt to be exceedingly affected with the obtaining of what we did not hope for, and much more with regaining of what we looked upon as lost and desperate. Whatever be the reason of it, such is the nature of man, that we are not so sensibly moved at the continuance of a good which we have long possessed, as at the recovery of it after it was lost and gone from us. And the reasons of a judicious value and esteem of a settled pleasure and contentment are one thing, and the causes of sudden joy and transport another. A continued course of goodness may in it self be more valuable, and yet repentance after a great fall and long wandrings may be much more moving and surprizing. For where things are constant and keep in the same tenor, they are not apt in their nature to give any new and sudden occasion of joy. And this is the reason given in the parable of the prodigal son; where the father tells his eldest son, who was so offended at the joyful reception and welcome of his prodigal brother, that "he had been "always with him, and all that he had was his;" that is, he was sensible of his constant duty and obedience,

dience, than which nothing could have been more acceptable; and that it had not, nor ſhould not loſe it's reward; but the return of his other ſon, after he had given over all hopes of him, and looked upon his caſe as deſperate, this was a marvellous ſurpriſe and a happineſs beyond expectation, which is the proper and natural cauſe of joy and gladneſs: and therefore he tells him, that upon ſuch an occaſion "it was meet "that we ſhould make merry and be glad, for this "thy brother was dead, and is alive again; was loſt, "and is found." His elder ſon's continuance in his duty was the enjoyment of what he had always had, but the return of his prodigal ſon was the retrieving of what he had given up for loſt, and a kind of reſurrection from the dead. And thus our bleſſed SAVIOUR, to encourage the repentance of ſinners, repreſents GOD after the manner of men; as if our heavenly Father did conceive ſuch a joy upon the repentance of a ſinner as earthly parents are wont to do upon the return of a wild and extravagant ſon to himſelf and his duty. SERM. XVI.

Having thus, as briefly and clearly as I could, explained the ſeveral difficulties in the text, I ſhall now deduce ſome inferences from it, and ſo conclude.

1. Firſt, that the bleſſed ſpirits above have ſome knowledge of the affairs of men here below, becauſe they are ſaid to rejoice at the converſion of a ſinner. This is ſpoken more particularly of the angels, as appears by comparing what is more generally ſaid in the text, that "there is joy in heaven," with what is more particularly expreſſed in the 10th verſe, that "there is joy in the preſence of the angels" over one ſinner that repenteth. Now whether the angels come

SERM. XVI.

to this knowledge by virtue of their miniſtry here below for the good of the elect, and ſo, in their continual intercourſe between heaven and earth, bring to their fellow-ſervants in heaven the joyful news of the repentance of ſinners upon earth; or whether GOD be pleaſed from time to time to reveal it to them, as a thing extremely welcome and delightful to good ſpirits, and tending to the increaſe of their happineſs, as it is not very material to enquire, ſo perhaps impoſſible for us to determine.

However, it cannot from hence be concluded that the angels or ſaints in heaven have ſuch an univerſal knowledge of our condition and affairs, as to be a reaſonable ground and warrant to us to pray to them, yea or to deſire them to pray for us; no, though this were done without any ſolemn circumſtances of invocation. For they may very well know ſome things concerning us wherein their own comfort and happineſs is likewiſe concerned, and yet be ignorant of all the reſt of our affairs. This one thing we are ſure they know, becauſe our SAVIOUR hath told us ſo; but we are ſure of no more. And there is neither equal reaſon for their knowledge of our other concernments, nor is there any revelation in ſcripture to that purpoſe.

2. Secondly, if GOD and the bleſſed ſpirits above rejoice at the converſion of a ſinner, ſo ſhould we too; and not fret and murmur as the Phariſees here did. This is the temper of the devil, and of very bad men, to regret and envy the good and happineſs of others. For it is reaſonable to believe, that proportionable to the joy that is in heaven at the repentance of a ſinner, is the grief and vexation of the devil

vil and his inſtruments, of evil ſpirits and wicked men. And as the devil delights in deſtroying ſouls; and "goes about like a roaring lion ſeeking whom "he may devour;" ſo no doubt he is in great rage and gnaſhes out of very diſcontent, when at any time he is fruſtrated of his hopes, and the prey which he thought himſelf ſure of is ſnatched out of his jaws. And thus we ſee it is with bad men, they do perſecute thoſe that forſake them and their wicked ways, and refuſe to go along with them to the ſame exceſs of riot.

And this is no where more viſible than among thoſe of the church of Rome. How full of wrath and indignation are they againſt thoſe who, out of pure conviction of the errors and corruptions of their church, come over to ours? How do they perſecute them with ſlanders and reproaches and with all the effects of hatred and malice? So that many times they can ſcarce refrain from doing them a real miſchief, even where it is dangerous to themſelves to attempt it: as if they envied them the grace of GOD and the opportunity of being ſaved.

I know it is too natural to thoſe of all communions, to be eager and fierce againſt thoſe that deſert them: and yet ſuppoſing they had the truth certainly on their ſide (which they cannot all have) I ſee no great reaſon for this temper and carriage; for why ſhould I caſt away my patience and my charity, becauſe another man hath made ſhipwreck of his faith? But I do not remember any where among mankind to have obſerved a more implacable malice, a more ſincere and hearty ill-will, than they of the church of Rome do conſtantly expreſs towards

SERM. XVI.

thoſe that forſake them; nay, though they give never ſo modeſt and reaſonable an account of their change, and behave themſelves towards their old friends with all the kindneſs and compaſſion in the world; yet their hatred and indignation againſt them runs ſo high, that one may plainly ſee they would ſooner forgive a man the greateſt ſins that human nature can be guilty of, and the breach of all the ten commandments, than this one crime of leaving their church, that is in truth of growing wiſer and better.

3. Thirdly, the conſideration of what hath been ſaid ſhould mightily inflame our zeal and quicken our induſtry and diligence for the converſion of ſinners. For if the converſion of one ſoul be worth ſo much labour and pains, and matter of ſuch joy to the bleſſed GOD and good ſpirits, what pains ſhould not we take in ſo corrupt and degenerate an age as this of ours; where impenitent ſinners do ſo much abound, and the juſt are almoſt failed from among the children of men?

Our bleſſed SAVIOUR indeed (according to the extraordinary decency of all his parables) puts the caſe very charitably, and lays the ſuppoſition quite on the other ſide: if there were but one ſinner in the world, or but one of an hundred, yet we ſhould very zealouſly intend, and with all our might, the reduction of this one loſt ſheep; and ſhould never be at reſt till this ſingle wandring ſoul were found and ſaved. But GOD knows this is not our caſe, but quite otherwiſe; which ſhould quicken our endeavours ſo much the more, and make us beſtir ourſelves to the utmoſt, having always in our minds that admirable ſaying of St. James, "he that converteth

"a ſin-

SERM. XVI.

" a ſinner from the error of his way ſhall ſave a ſoul " from death." He that knows the value of an immortal ſoul, and how fearful a thing it is to periſh everlaſtingly, can think no pains too much to take to ſave a ſoul from death.

4. Laſtly, what an argument and encouragement is here to repentance, even to the greateſt of ſinners? They, I am ſure, ſtand moſt in need of it: and though they of all others have the leaſt reaſon to look for mercy, yet they ſhall not be refuſed; though they be like the publicans and heathens among the Jews, who were not only reputed but many times really were the worſt of men; though like the prodigal ſon, here in the parable, they have run away from their father and waſted their eſtate in lewd and riotous courſes; yet whenever they come to themſelves and are willing to return to their father, to acknowledge their folly and repent of it, he is ready to receive them; nay much more ready to receive them than they can be to come to him: for when the prodigal was but coming towards his father, and " was yet " afar off, the father runs to meet him," and embraceth him with as much kindneſs as if he had never offended him, and entertains him with more joy than if he had always continued with him.

How does the great GOD condeſcend to encourage our repentance; repreſenting himſelf and all the bleſſed company of heaven as tranſported with joy at the converſion of a ſinner, and almoſt ſetting a greater value upon repentance than even upon innocence itſelf? and if our heavenly father, who hath been ſo infinitely offended and ſo highly provoked by us beyond all patience, be ſo ready, ſo forward, ſo glad

SERM. XVI.

to receive us, and there be no hindrance, no difficulty, no discouragement on his part; is it possible after all this that we can be such fools and such enemies to ourselves, as to be backward to our own happiness! All of us, the best of us, have too much cause for repentance; and I fear too many of us stand in need of that repentance intended by our SAVIOUR in the text, which consists in the change of our whole lives.

But I will not upbraid you with your faults; having no design to provoke, but only to persuade men. I leave it to every one's conscience to tell him how great a sinner, how grievous an offender he hath been. GOD knows we take no pleasure in mentioning the sins of men, but only in their amendment; and we would, if it were possible, even without minding them how bad they have been, persuade and encourage them to be better.

It is but a small consideration to tell you how much it would chear and comfort our hearts, and quicken our zeal and industry for the salvation of our souls, to see some fruit of our labours; that all our pains are not lost, and that all the good counsel that is from hence tendered to you is not like rain falling upon the rocks, and showers upon the sands.

But I have much greater considerations to offer to you; that your repentance will at once rejoice the heart of GOD, and angels, and men: that it is a returning to a right mind, and the restoring of you to yourselves, to the ease and peace of your own consciences, and to a capacity of being everlastingly happy: that it is to take pity upon yourselves and your poor immortal souls; and to take due care to

prevent

prevent that which is to be dreaded above all things, the being miſerable for ever: and laſt of all, that if thou wilt not repent now, the time will certainly come, and that perhaps in this life, when you ſhall ſee the greateſt need of repentance, and perhaps with miſerable Eſau find no place for it, though you ſeek it carefully with tears; when you "ſhall cry, "LORD, LORD, and the door ſhall be ſhut againſt "you; and ſhall ſeek to enter, but ſhall not be a-"ble. To be ſure in the other world you ſhall eternally repent to no purpoſe, and be continually lamenting your wretched condition without hopes of remedy; for there ſhall be weeping and wailing without effect, without intermiſſion, and without end.

And what cauſe have we to thank GOD that this is not yet our caſe, that we are yet on this ſide the pit of deſtruction, and the gulf of deſpair? O the infinite patience and boundleſs goodneſs of GOD to ſinners! with what clemency hath he ſpared us, and ſuffered our manners thus long? And with what kindneſs and concernment does he ſtill call upon us to leave our ſins and to return to him, as if in ſo doing we ſhould make him happy and not our ſelves? With what earneſt longings and deſires doth he wait and wiſh for our repentance, ſaying, "O that there were "ſuch an heart in them! O that they would hark-"en unto my voice! when ſhall it once be?" Thus GOD is repreſented in ſcripture as patiently attending and liſtning what effect his admonitions and counſels, his reproofs and threatnings will have upon ſinners, Jer. viii. 6. "I hearkened and I heard, but they ſpake "not aright: no man repented him of his wicked-"neſs, ſaying, what have I done? Every one turn-

"ed

SERM. XVI.

" ed to his courſe, as the horſe ruſheth into the " battel."

And is not this our caſe? GOD hath long waited for our repentance; and once a year we ſolemnly pretend to ſet about it: but many of us hitherto, I fear, inſtead of returning to GOD have but more blindly and furiouſly run on in our courſe, like the horſe that has no underſtanding; yea in this more brutiſh than the beaſt, that he ruſheth into the battel without any conſideration of death or danger, and deſtroys himſelf without a ſyllogiſm: but we ſinners have reaſon, and yet are mad; the greateſt part of evil doers are ſufficiently ſenſible of the danger of their courſe, and convinced that eternal miſery and ruin will be the end of it; and yet, I know not how, they make a ſhift upon one pretence or other to diſcourſe and reaſon themſelves into it.

But becauſe the " word of GOD is quick and power- " ful, and ſharper than a two-edged ſword," and comes with a greater weight and force upon the minds of men than any human perſuaſion whatſoever, I will conclude all with thoſe ſhort and ſerious counſels and exhortations of GOD to ſinners by his holy prophets.

" Conſider and ſhew your ſelves men, O ye tranſ- " greſſors: Be inſtructed, O Jeruſalem, leſt my ſoul " depart from thee: ſeek the LORD while he may be " found; call upon him while he is near: repent and " turn your ſelves from all your tranſgreſſions, ſo " iniquity ſhall not be your ruin."

SER-

SERMON XVII.

Of the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt.

MATTH. xii. 31, 32.

Wherefore I ſay unto you, all manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men, but the blaſphemy againſt the holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men.

And whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the ſon of man, it ſhall be forgiven him: but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

SERM. XVII.

THE occaſion of theſe words of our bleſſed SAVIOUR was the blaſphemy of the Phariſees againſt that divine power by which he wrought his miracles, and particularly did caſt out devils. Which works of his, though they were wrought by the ſpirit of GOD, yet they obſtinately and maliciouſly imputed them to the power of the devil. Upon which our SAVIOUR takes occaſion to declare the danger of the ſin, which he calls blaſpheming of the holy Ghoſt: and tells them that this was ſo great a ſin above all other, that it is in a peculiar manner unpardonable. "Wherefore I ſay unto you, "&c."

For the explaining of theſe words, and the nature and unpardonableneſs of this ſin, we will enquire into theſe four things:

Firſt, what is the difference between ſpeaking againſt the ſon of man, and ſpeaking againſt the holy Ghoſt.

Secondly,

Secondly, wherein the nature of this sin or blasphemy against the holy Ghost doth consist.

Thirdly, in what sense this sin is here said to be peculiarly unpardonable. And

Fourthly, upon what account it is so.

1. What is the difference between speaking against the son of man and speaking against the holy Ghost. The reason of this enquiry is, because the text plainly puts a great difference between them, though it be not obvious to discern where it lies. For our SAVIOUR tells us, that "whosoever speaks a word against "the son of man it shall be forgiven him, but who- "soever speaketh against the holy Ghost it shall ne- "ver be forgiven him:" and yet this blasphemy of the Pharisees against the holy Ghost was speaking against the son of man. For to say he cast out devils by the power of the devil, though it was a blaspheming of the holy Ghost by whose power he wrought these miracles, yet it was likewise a blaspheming of CHRIST himself, and was in effect to say that he was no true prophet nor did come from GOD, but was a magician and impostor.

For the removing of this difficulty I shall not need to say as some learned men have done, that by the son of man is here to be understood any man, and that our SAVIOUR is not particularly designed by it. That seems very hard, when our SAVIOUR is so frequently in the gospel called the son of man. And especially when St. Luke reciting these words does immediately before give him this very title to put the matter out of all doubt, Luke xii. 8, 9, 10. "Also I say unto "you, whosoever shall confess me before men, him "shall the son of man also confess before the angels

" of GOD: but he that denieth me before men shall SERM. XVII.
" be denied before the angels of GOD." Upon which it follows, " and whosoever shall speak a word against " the son of man it shall be forgiven him." So that in all reason the son of man is the very same person that had this title given him in the foregoing words, viz. our blessed SAVIOUR. So that I take it for granted, that by speaking against the son of man is here meant speaking against CHRIST: and by speaking against him, as it is opposed to speaking against the holy Ghost, is meant all those reproaches and contumelies which they cast upon our SAVIOUR's person, without reflecting upon that divine power which he testified by his miracles. As their reproaching him with the meanness of his birth, " Is not this the carpenter's son?" with the place of it (as they supposed) " out of Gali- " lee ariseth no prophet:" their reflecting upon his life, saying that he was " a wine-bibber and a glutton, a " friend of publicans and sinners;" with many other calumnies which they maliciously cast upon him.

But by speaking against the holy Ghost is meant their blaspheming and reproaching that divine power whereby he wrought his miracles; which though it did at last likewise reflect upon our SAVIOUR's person, yet it was an immediate reflection upon the holy Ghost, and a blaspheming of him; and therefore it is called speaking against the holy Ghost, by way of distinction or opposition to the other calumnies which they used against our SAVIOUR; which were proper blasphemies and reproaches of his person, but not of the holy Ghost also, as this was. This seems to me to be the true difference here intended by our SAVIOUR between " speaking against the son of man,

SERM. XVII.

"and ſpeaking againſt the holy Ghoſt." Let us in the

II. Second place, enquire wherein the nature of this ſin or blaſphemy againſt the holy Ghoſt doth conſiſt. And the true nature of this ſin, though it be ſo plainly to be gathered from our SAVIOUR's deſcription of it, yet, I know not how, a great many learned men have made a hard ſhift to miſtake it. Some have made it to be final impenitency, becauſe that is unpardonable. But why that, rather than any thing elſe that is bad, ſhould be called a blaſpheming of the holy Ghoſt, it is hard to give a reaſon. Others have placed the nature of it in a "wilful and obſtinate op-"poſition of the truth:" which though it be a great ſin, and included in the ſin here ſpoken of, or a concomitant of it; yet there is great reaſon to believe that this is not all that is here meant by it. Others would have it to conſiſt in a malicious oppoſition of the truth, "when men know and are convinced that it "is the truth;" which is a great ſin indeed, if ever any man were guilty of it; but it is a great queſtion whether human nature be capable of it. A man may indeed have ſufficient means of conviction, and yet not be convinced; but it is hardly imaginable that a man ſhould oppoſe the truth when he is actually convinced that it is the truth. And to mention no more, others think it to conſiſt in a renouncing of the truth for fear of ſuffering; which made Francis Spira to think that he had committed this ſin.

But with all due reſpect to the judgment of others, I cannot think that any of theſe is the ſin our SAVIOUR here deſcribes. As I ſhall endeavour plainly to ſhew, by conſidering the occaſion of our SAVIOUR's mentioning of it, the perſons upon whom our

SA-

SAVIOUR chargeth this ſin, and upon what account he chargeth them with it.

At the 22d ver. of this chapter there was brought to our SAVIOUR "one poſſeſſed with a devil, blind "and dumb, and he healed him." Upon this "the "people were amazed, and ſaid, is not this the ſon "of David?" that is, the Meſſias. The Phariſees hearing this, with great bitterneſs and contempt ſaid, "this fellow doth not caſt out devils but by Beelze-"bub the prince of devils." Upon this our SAVIOUR repreſents to them the unreaſonableneſs of this calumny; and that upon theſe two conſiderations: 1ſt. That it was very unlikely that the devil ſhould lend him this power to uſe it againſt himſelf. "Every "kingdom divided againſt it ſelf is brought to de-"ſolation: and every city or houſe divided againſt "it ſelf ſhall not ſtand. And if Satan caſt out Satan, "he is divided againſt himſelf, how ſhall then his "kingdom ſtand? 2dly. Our SAVIOUR tells them, they might with as much reaſon attribute all miracles to the devil. There were thoſe among themſelves who caſt out devils in the name of the GOD of Abraham, Iſaac and Jacob (as Origen, and Tertullian, and Juſtin Martyr tell us.) Of theſe our SAVIOUR ſpeaks, and aſks the Phariſees "by what power they "caſt them out?" But they acknowledged that theſe did it by the power of GOD, and there was no cauſe, but their malice, why they ſhould not have acknowledged that he did it likewiſe by the ſame power, ver. 27. "If I by Beelzebub caſt out devils, "by whom do your children caſt them out? there-"fore they ſhall be your judges;" that is, this may be ſufficient to convince you of malice to me: "but

" if I caſt out devils by the ſpirit of GOD, then the " kingdom of GOD is come unto you," that is, the Meſſias is come; becauſe he wrought theſe and other miracles to prove that he was the Meſſias. And then it follows, " wherefore I ſay unto you, all " manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven " unto men, but the blaſphemy againſt the holy " Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men."

So that the Phariſees are the perſons charged with this ſin or blaſphemy againſt the holy Ghoſt. And their blaſphemy was plainly this, that when he caſt out devils by the ſpirit of GOD, they ſaid he did it by the power of the devil; they maliciouſly aſcribed theſe works of the holy Ghoſt to the devil.

And that this is the ground why our SAVIOUR chargeth them with this ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt is yet more plain from St. Mark, Mark iii. 28, 29, 30. " verily I ſay unto you, all ſins ſhall be forgiven " unto the ſons of men, and blaſphemies wherewith " ſoever they ſhall blaſpheme: but he that blaſphe- " meth againſt the holy Ghoſt, hath never forgive- " neſs, but is in danger of eternal damnation; be- " cauſe they ſaid he hath an unclean ſpirit:" that is, becauſe the Phariſees charged him to be a magician and to have a familiar ſpirit, by whoſe aſſiſtance he did thoſe works; when in truth he did them by the ſpirit of GOD; therefore our SAVIOUR declares them guilty of this ſin of blaſpheming the holy Ghoſt, which ſhould never be forgiven.

So that the nature of this ſin did conſiſt in a moſt malicious oppoſition to the utmoſt evidence that could be given to the truth of any religion. Our bleſſed SAVIOUR, to ſhew that he was ſent by GOD, and

SERM. XVII.

and came from him, wrought miracles, ſuch as did plainly evidence a divine power and preſence accompanying him. For in St. Luke he is ſaid to do them "by the finger of GOD," Luke xi. 20. "by the finger "of GOD," that is, to do ſuch things as were undeniable evidences of the divine power and preſence. And this is the utmoſt teſtimony that GOD ever gave to any perſon that was ſent by him. And the Phariſees were eye-witneſſes of thoſe miracles which our SAVIOUR wrought, ſo that they could not deny them: yet ſuch was their oppoſition to him and his doctrine, that though they ſaw theſe things done by him, and could not deny the reality of them, yet rather than they would own him to be the Meſſias and his doctrine to come from GOD, they moſt maliciouſly and unreaſonably aſcribed them to the power of the devil. And this was the blaſphemy which they were guilty of againſt the holy Ghoſt. And herein lay the greatneſs of their ſin, in reſiſting the evidence of thoſe miracles which were ſo plainly wrought by the holy Ghoſt; and which, though themſelves ſaw, yet they maliciouſly imputed them to the devil, rather than they would be convinced by them. And this is ſo very plain, that hardly any man, that conſiders our SAVIOUR's diſcourſe upon this occaſion, can otherwiſe determine the nature of this ſin, eſpecially if he do but attend to thoſe remarkable words which I cited before (Mark iii. 29.) "but he that blaſphe-"meth againſt the holy Ghoſt hath never forgive-"neſs, but is in danger of eternal damnation; be-"cauſe they ſaid, he hath an unclean ſpirit." I come now to the

III. Third

III. Third thing I propounded, namely, in what ſenſe this ſin is here ſaid to be peculiarly unpardonable: For this ſin our SAVIOUR poſitively affirms to be in this different from all other ſins, that it is capable of no pardon: "I ſay unto you, all manner of "ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men; but "the blaſphemy againſt the holy Ghoſt ſhall not "be forgiven unto men:" and to ſhew what he means by the not forgiving of it, he tells us, that eternal puniſhment ſhall follow it in the other world. "Whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the ſon of "man, it ſhall be forgiven him: but whoſoever "ſpeaketh againſt the holy Ghoſt, it ſhall never be "forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the "world to come." Which St. Mark expreſſeth more plainly, that it ſhall bring thoſe who are guilty of it to eternal damnation, Mark iii. 29. "he that blaſ-"phemeth againſt the holy Ghoſt, hath never for-"giveneſs, but is liable to eternal damnation." So that when our SAVIOUR ſays, "it ſhall never be for-"given, neither in this world, nor in the world to "come," he does not intend to inſinuate that ſome ſins which are not forgiven in this world may be forgiven in the other; but in theſe words he either alludes to the opinion of the Jews concerning the effect of the higheſt excommunication, the ſentence whereof they held not to be reverſible, neither in this world nor the other; or elſe the reaſon of this expreſſion may probably be to meet with a common and falſe opinion amongſt the Jews, which was, that ſome ſins which are not pardoned to men in this life, may by ſacrifices be expiated in the other; and therefore he ſays it ſhall never be forgiven, neither in this world

world nor the other. And St. Mark more plainly, that thoſe who are guilty of it "ſhall never have for- "giveneſs," but "be liable to eternal damnation." So that our SAVIOUR's meaning ſeems plainly to be this, that this ſin is altogether incapable of forgiveneſs. I know ſome have endeavoured to mollify this matter, but (I think) without ſufficient reaſon. Grotius underſtands the words comparatively, that any ſort of ſin ſhall ſooner be forgiven than this againſt the holy Ghoſt; and that our SAVIOUR only intended to expreſs the greatneſs and heinouſneſs of this ſin above others, in which reſpect the pardon of it would be more difficult than of any other ſin; but yet that the caſe of ſuch a perſon is not abſolutely deſperate: but if our SAVIOUR had intended to ſay, that this ſin was abſolutely unpardonable, I would fain know how could he have expreſſed the matter in higher and fuller words? Dr. Hammond mollifies the words another way, that this ſin ſhall never be pardoned, but upon a particular repentance for it: as if our SAVIOUR's meaning was, that a general repentance, which was ſufficient for ſins of ignorance, would not be ſufficient in this caſe, but there muſt be a particular repentance for it, without which it would never be pardoned. But this is by no means agreeable to the ſcope of our SAVIOUR's diſcourſe: becauſe he plainly intends to difference this from all other ſorts of ſins, I ſay unto you, all manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men. But according to this interpretation our SAVIOUR muſt mean, that all other ſins would be forgiven upon a general repentance; which is not true, for there are many other ſins beſides ſins of ignorance, there are

SERM. XVII.

SERM. XVII.

wilful and heinous ſins, ſuch as wilful murder and adultery and blaſphemy, (that only excepted which is againſt the holy Ghoſt) and the like groſs ſins, which all divines hold ſhall not be forgiven, but upon a particular repentance. So that this interpretation does not ſufficiently difference this ſin from all other ſorts of ſins, which, it is yet very plain, our SAVIOUR intended to do. It remains then that theſe words muſt in all reaſon be underſtood abſolutely, that the perſons that are guilty of this great ſin ſhall never have it forgiven unto them. And it may be this will not ſeem ſo harſh, when we have conſidered in the

IV. Fourth place, how it comes to paſs that this ſin is above all others incapable of pardon: and that, upon theſe two accounts.

Firſt, becauſe by this ſin men reſiſt their laſt remedy, and oppoſe the beſt and utmoſt means of their conviction. What can GOD be imagined to do more to convince a man of a divine revelation, or of the truth of any doctrine or meſſage that comes from him, than to work miracles to this purpoſe? And what greater aſſurance can men have that miracles are wrought, than to be eye-witneſſes of them themſelves? And if men will reſiſt ſuch evidence, what can GOD do more for their ſatisfaction? If, when men ſee plain miracles wrought, they will ſay that it is not the power of GOD that does them, but the power of the devil: and if, when men ſee the devils caſt out, they will ſay that the devil conſpires againſt himſelf; this is to outface the ſun at noon-day, and there is no way left to convince ſuch perverſe perſons of the truth of any divine revelation. So that there is no remedy but ſuch perſons muſt continue in their oppoſition

position to the truth. For this is such a sin as does in it's own nature shut out and prevent all remedy. And he, that thus perversely and maliciously opposeth the truth, must, upon the same grounds, unavoidably continue in his opposition to it; because there is nothing left to be done for his conviction, more than is already done. If God should send a person immediately from heaven to him to convince him of his error, he can give him no greater testimony, that he comes from God, than miracles: and if when God enables that person to work these by the power of his spirit, this man will obstinately impute them to the power of the devil, he defeats all the imaginable means of his own conviction. So that it is no wonder if that sin be unpardonable, which resists the last and utmost means, which God hath ever yet thought fit to use to bring men to repentance and salvation. And if God were willing to reveal himself, and the way to pardon and salvation to such a one, he doth, by this very temper and dispositon, render himself incapable of being satisfied and convinced concerning any divine revelation. SERM. XVII.

Secondly, because this sin is of that high nature, that God is therefore justly provoked to withdraw his grace from such persons; and, it is probable, resolved so to do; without which grace they will continue impenitent. There is no doubt but God, if he will, can work so powerfully upon the minds of men by his grace and spirit, as to convince the most obstinate: and supposing them to be convinced and repent, it cannot be denied but that they would be forgiven. And therefore when our Saviour here says they shall not be forgiven, it is reasonable to suppose that he means, that when persons are come to that degree of obsti-

obſtinacy and malice, GOD will (as juſtly he may) withdraw his grace from them: "his ſpirit will not ſtrive "with them" to overcome their obſtinacy, but will leave them to the biaſs of their own perverſe and malicious minds: which will ſtill engage them in a farther oppoſition to the truth, and finally ſink them into perdition. So that being deſerted by GOD, and for want of the neceſſary help and aid of his grace (juſtly withdrawn from them) continuing finally impenitent, they become incapable of forgiveneſs both in this world and that which is to come. And there is nothing that can ſeem harſh or unreaſonable in this, to thoſe who grant (as I think all men do) that GOD may be ſo provoked by men as juſtly to withdraw his grace from them in this life, that grace which is neceſſary to their repentance. And ſurely if any provocation be likely to do it, this cannot be denied to be of all others the greateſt, obſtinately and maliciouſly to oppoſe the utmoſt evidence that GOD ever gave to the truth of any doctrine revealed by him. And of this the Phariſees, who are here charged with this ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt, were notoriouſly guilty in reſiſting the clear evidence of our SAVIOUR's miracles.

And thus I have done with the four things I propounded to enquire into from theſe words, namely, the difference between ſpeaking againſt the ſon of man, and ſpeaking againſt the holy Ghoſt; wherein the nature of this ſin of blaſphemy againſt the holy Ghoſt does conſiſt; and in what ſenſe this ſin is ſaid to be unpardonable; and upon what account it is ſo; namely, becauſe men by this ſin reſiſt their laſt remedy, and oppoſe the beſt and utmoſt means of their con-

conviction: and because it may reasonably be supposed, that upon provocation of this high nature, GOD may and is resolved to withdraw that grace from such persons which is necessary to their repentance, without which their sin remains for ever unpardonable.

All that now remains is to make this discourse some way or other useful to ourselves. And it may very well serve to these two purposes. First, to comfort some very good and pious persons, who are liable to despair out of an apprehension that they have committed this sin. Secondly, to caution others against the approaches to it.

1. First, to comfort some very good and pious persons, who are liable to despair upon an apprehension that they have committed this great and unpardonable sin; and consequently are utterly incapable of ever being restored to the mercy and favour of GOD. And nothing can be more for the comfort of such persons than to understand aright what the nature of this sin is, and wherein the heinousness of it doth consist; which I have endeavoured to manifest. And if this be the nature of it which I have declared, as it seems very plain that it is, then I cannot see how any person now is likely to be in those circumstances as to be capable of committing it. And being a sin of so heinous a nature, and declared by our SAVIOUR to be absolutely unpardonable, there is no reason to extend it beyond the case to which our SAVIOUR applies it; which was the resisting of the evidence of the miracles which were wrought for the truth of Christianity, by those who were eye-witnesses of them, that is, by those who had the utmost assurance of them that human nature is capable of. And not only a

SERM. XVII.

bare reſiſtance of that evidence, but with a very malicious circumſtance, ſo as to impute thoſe works, which were wrought by the holy Ghoſt, to the power of the devil. This was the caſe of the Phariſees whom our SAVIOUR chargeth with this ſin. And no body hath warrant to extend this ſin any farther than this caſe: and without good warrant it would be the moſt uncharitable thing in the world to extend it any farther.

That which comes neareſt to it, both in the heinouſneſs of the crime and the unpardonableneſs of it, is total apoſtaſy from Chriſtianity, after the embracing of it and full conviction of the truth of it. And this the ſcripture ſeems to place, if not in the ſame rank, yet very near to it. And of this the apoſtle ſpeaks very often in the epiſtle to the Hebrews under the Name of unbelief, and ſin by way of eminence, as being the great ſin that Chriſtians were in danger of falling into, called in that epiſtle, (Heb. xii. 1.) ἡ εὐπερίσατος ἁμαρτία, the ſin which Chriſtians, by reaſon of the circumſtances they were then in, were eſpecially ſubject to: and he parallels it with the caſe of the Jews in the wilderneſs, concerning whom "GOD ſware that they ſhould not "enter into his reſt," namely, the earthly Canaan which was a type of heaven, chap. iii. ver. 18. And chap. vi. ver. 4, 5, 6. more expreſly: "For it is im-"poſſible that thoſe who were once enlightened, and "have taſted of the heavenly gift, and were made "partakers of the holy Ghoſt, and have taſted "the good word of GOD, and the powers of the "world to come, if they ſhould fall away, to renew "them again to repentance." Where by impoſſible, the leaſt

leaſt that can be meant is, that it is extremely difficult for ſuch perſons to recover themſelves by repentance. And 'tis obſervable that thoſe perſons are ſaid to have been partakers of the holy Ghoſt, by which is meant that they were endued with a power of miracles by the holy Ghoſt, or were under the conviction of them, as having ſeen them wrought by others. So that this apoſtaſy may be ſaid in that reſpect to be "a ſin a-"gainſt the holy Ghoſt." So likewiſe, chap. x. ver. 26. "If we ſin wilfully after we have received the know-"ledge of the truth," (that is, if we apoſtatize from Chriſtianity, after we have embraced the profeſſion of it, as appears plainly from the ſcope of the apoſtle's diſcourſe) "there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin:" which expreſſion declares this ſin either to be unpardonable, or ſomething very like it. And at the 29th ver. thoſe perſons are ſaid to "tread under foot "the Son of GOD, and to do deſpite unto the ſpirit of "grace." Which ſignifies that the ſin there ſpoken of is more immediately committed againſt the holy Spirit of GOD. St. Peter likewiſe declares the great danger of this ſin, 2 Pet. ii. 20. "If after they have "eſcaped the pollutions of the world through the "knowledge of the Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST "they are again entangled therein and overcome, "the latter end is worſe with them than the begin-"ning." St. John likewiſe ſeems to ſpeak of this ſin of apoſtaſy, and to call it "a ſin unto death:" diſcouraging Chriſtians rather from praying for thoſe who were fallen into it; which gives great ſuſpicion that he looked upon it as hardly pardonable, 1 Joh. v. 16. "If any man ſee his brother ſin a ſin unto "death, he ſhall aſk, and he ſhall give him life

SERM. XVII.

SERM. XVII.

" for thoſe that ſin not unto death. There is a ſin " unto death, I do not ſay that he ſhall pray for it." Now that by the ſin unto death the apoſtle here means apoſtaſy from the Chriſtian religion to the heathen idolatry, ſeems extremely probable from what follows, ver. 18. " We know that whoſoever is born " of GOD ſinneth not, but keepeth himſelf, and that " wicked one toucheth him not;" that is, he preſerveth himſelf from idolatry, which the devil had ſeduced the world into, ver. 19. " And we know that " we are of GOD, and the whole world lieth in wick- " edneſs, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ, in the wicked one;" that is, is under the power of the devil; " and we know that " the Son of GOD is come, and hath given us un- " derſtanding to know him that is true;" that is, to diſtinguiſh between the true GOD and idols. And then it follows, " this is the true GOD and eternal " life: little children, keep yourſelves from idols." Which laſt caution is a key to the underſtanding of all the reſt, and makes it very probable, that the ſin unto death is apoſtaſy from Chriſtianity unto idolatry: otherwiſe it is hard to imagine how the laſt clauſe comes in, " little children, keep your ſelves " from idols." And this is that ſin which of all other approacheth neareſt to this ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt which our SAVIOUR ſpeaks of, and concerning the pardonableneſs of which the ſcripture ſeems to ſpeak very doubtfully. But if it were of the ſame unpardonable nature, yet this can be no trouble to thoſe perſons I am ſpeaking of, who cannot but know themſelves to be far enough from the guilt of this ſin.

As for thoſe other ſins, which by ſome are taken to be the ſins againſt the holy Ghoſt, they are either ſuch

as

as perhaps no man is capable of committing, as a malicious oppoſition to the truth, when I am convinced and know it to be the truth: for this ſeems to be a contradiction, to know any thing to be the truth, and to believe it to be ſo, and yet to oppoſe it; becauſe the underſtanding can no more oppoſe truth as truth, than the will can refuſe good as good. Or elſe, they are ſuch as no man can know he is guilty of in this life; as, final impenitency, which ſuppoſeth a man to live and die without repentance. Or elſe, ſuch as I think no good man is incident to; as, a malicious and perverſe oppoſing of the truth after ſufficient means of conviction. However, none of theſe are that which the ſcripture deſcribes to be the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt, as I have already ſhewn.

But ſtill there are two things which uſually trouble honeſt and well-meaning perſons, but are rather the effects of melancholy than any reaſonable ground of trouble. Some think that every deliberate ſin againſt knowledge, and after conviction, is the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt. This is acknowledged to be a very great aggravation of ſin, and ſuch as calls for a great and particular repentance; but does by no means render a man incapable of forgiveneſs. Others are troubled with blaſphemous thoughts, and thoſe they think to be the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt. But this is generally the meer effect of melancholy, and the perſons that are troubled with theſe black thoughts are no ways conſenting to them, but they riſe in their minds perfectly againſt their wills and without any approbation of theirs: and in this caſe they are ſo far from being the unpardonable ſin, that I hope, yea

and

SERM. XVII.

and verily believe, they are no ſins at all, but the meer effects of a bodily diſtemper; and no more imputed to us than the wild and idle ravings of a man in a frenzy or a fever. And GOD forbid that the natural effects of a bodily diſeaſe ſhould bring guilt upon our ſouls. So that theſe perſons have reaſon enough for comfort; but the miſery is, their preſent diſtemper renders them incapable of it.

2. Secondly, the other uſe I would make of this diſcourſe is, to caution men againſt the degrees and approaches of this ſin. For if the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt be of ſuch a high nature and ſo unpardonable, then all approaches to it are very dreadful. Such as are, profane ſcoffing at religion, and the holy ſpirit of GOD which dwells in good men: abuſe of the holy ſcriptures, which were indited by the ſpirit of GOD: perverſe infidelity, notwithſtanding all the evidence which we have for the truth of Chriſtianity, and ſufficient aſſurance of the miracles wrought for the confirmation of it, brought down to us by credible hiſtory, though we are not eye-witneſſes of them: obſtinacy in a ſinful and vicious courſe, notwithſtanding all the motives and arguments of the goſpel to perſuade men to repentance. Sinning againſt the clear conviction of our conſciences, and the motions and ſuggeſtions of GOD's holy Spirit to the contrary. Malicious oppoſing of the truth when the arguments for it are very plain and evident to any impartial and unprejudiced mind, and when he that oppoſeth the truth hath no clear ſatisfaction in his own mind to the contrary, but ſuffers himſelf to be furiouſly and headily carried on in his oppoſition to it. Theſe are all ſins of a very high nature, and of the neareſt affi-

nity

nity with this great and unpardonable sin, of any that can easily be instanced in. And though GOD, to encourage the repentance of men, has not declared them unpardonable, yet they are great provocations; and if they be long continued in, we know not how soon GOD may withdraw his grace from us, and suffer us to be "hardened through the deceitfulness of "sin." SERM. XVII.

Be ready then to entertain the truth of GOD whenever it is fairly propounded to thee, and with such evidence as thou art willing to accept in other matters where thou hast no prejudice nor interest to the contrary. Do nothing contrary to thy known duty, but be careful in all things to obey the convictions of thine own conscience, and to yield to the good motions and suggestions of GOD's holy Spirit, who works secretly upon the minds of men, and inspires us many times gently with good thoughts and inclinations, and is grieved when we do not comply with them; and after many repulses will at last withdraw himself from us, and leave us to be assaulted by the temptations of the devil, and to be hurried away by our own lusts into ruin and perdition.

SERMON XVIII.

The example of Jesus in doing good.

ACTS x. 38.

——Who went about doing good.

SERM. XVIII.

WHEN almighty God designed the reformation of the world and the restoring of man to the image of God, the pattern after which he was first made, he did not think it enough to give us the most perfect laws of holiness and virtue; but hath likewise set before us a living pattern, and a familiar example to excite and encourage us, to go before us and shew us the way, and as it were to lead us by the hand in the obedience of those laws. Such is the sovereign authority of God over men that he might, if he had pleased, have only given us a law written with his own hand, as he did to the people of Israel from mount Sinai: but such is his goodness, that he hath sent a great embassador from heaven to us, "God "manifested in the flesh," to declare and interpret his will and pleasure; and not only so, but to fulfil that law himself, the observation whereof he requires of us. The bare rules of a good life are a very dead and ineffectual thing in comparison of a living example, which shews us the possibility and practicableness of our duty; both that it may be done, and how to do it. Religion indeed did always consist in an imitation of God, and in our resemblance of those excellencies

lencies which shine forth in the best and most perfect being; but we may imitate him now with much greater ease and advantage, since GOD was pleased to become man on purpose to shew us how men may become like to GOD. And this is one great end for which the son of GOD came into the world, and "was "made flesh, and dwelt among us," and conversed so long and familiarly with mankind; that in his own person and life he might give us the example of all that holiness and virtue which his laws require of us. And as he was in nothing liker the son of GOD than in being and doing good, so is he in nothing a fitter pattern for our imitation than in that excellent character given of him here in the text, that "he went "about doing good."

SERM. XVIII.

In which words two things offer themselves to our consideration.

First, our SAVIOUR's great work and business in the world, which was to do good: ὃς διῆλθεν εὐεργετῶν, who employed himself in being a benefactor to mankind. This refers more especially to his healing the bodily diseases and infirmities of men. "GOD "anointed JESUS of Nazareth with the holy Ghost "and with power; who went about doing good, "and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." intimating to us by this instance of his doing good, that he, who took so much pains to rescue mens bodies from the power and possession of the devil, would not let their souls remain under his tyranny. But though the text instanceth only in one particular, yet this general expression of doing good comprehends all those several ways whereby he was beneficial to mankind.

SERM. XVIII.

Secondly, here is his diligence and industry in this work, "he went about doing good;" he made it the great business and constant employment of his life. I shall propound to you the pattern of our SAVIOUR in both these particulars.

I. His great work and business in the world was to do good. The most pleasant and delightful, the most happy and glorious work in the world. It is a work of a large extent, and of an universal influence; and comprehends in it all those ways whereby we may be useful and beneficial to one another. And indeed it were pity that so good a thing should be confined within narrow bounds and limits. It reacheth to the souls of men, and to their bodies; and is conversant in all those ways and kinds whereby we may serve the temporal or spiritual good of our neighbour, and promote his present and his future happiness. What our blessed SAVIOUR did in this kind, and we in imitation of him ought to do, I shall reduce to these two heads. First, doing good to the souls of men and endeavouring to promote their spiritual and eternal happiness. Secondly, the procuring of their temporal good, and contributing as much as may be to their happiness in this present life.

1. Doing good to the souls of men and endeavouring to promote their spiritual and eternal happiness, by good instruction, and by good example.

First, by good instruction. And under instruction I comprehend all the means of bringing men to the knowledge of their duty, and exciting them to the practice of it; by instructing their ignorance, and removing their prejudices, and rectifying their mistakes, by persuasion and by reproof; and by mak-

ing

ing lasting provision for the promoting of these ends. SERM. XVIII.

By instructing men's ignorance. And this is a duty which every man owes to another as he hath opportunity, but especially to those who are under our care and charge, our children and servants and near relations, those over whom we have a special authority, and a more immediate influence. This our blessed SAVIOUR made his great work in the world, to instruct all sorts of persons in the things which concerned the kingdom of GOD and to direct them in the way to eternal happiness; by publick teaching, and by private conversation, and by taking occasion from the common occurrences of human life, and every object that presented it self to him, to instil good counsel into men, and to raise their minds to the consideration of divine and heavenly things. And though this was our SAVIOUR's great employment, and is theirs more particularly whose office it is to teach others; yet every man hath private opportunities of instructing others, by admonishing them of their duty, and by directing them to the best means and helps of knowledge; such as are books of piety and religion, with which they that are rich may furnish those who are unable to provide for themselves.

And then by removing men's prejudices against the truth, and rectifying their mistakes. This our SAVIOUR found very difficult; the generality of those with whom he had to do being strongly prejudiced against him and his doctrine by false principles, which they had taken in by education, and been trained up to by their teachers. And therefore he used a great deal of meekness in instructing those that opposed

posed themselves, and exercised abundance of patience in bearing with the infirmities of men, and their dulness and slowness of capacity to receive the truth.

And this is great charity, to consider the inveterate prejudices of men; especially those which are rooted in education, and which men are confirmed in by the reverence they bear to those that have been their teachers. And great allowance is to be given to men in this case, and time to bethink themselves and to consider better. For no man that is in an error thinks he is so; and therefore if we go violently to rend their opinions from them, they will but hold them so much the faster; but if we have patience to unrip them by degrees, they will at last fall in pieces of themselves.

And when this is done, the way is open for counsel and persuasion. And this our SAVIOUR administred in a most powerful and effectual manner, by encouraging men to repentance, and by representing to them the infinite advantages of obeying his laws, and the dreadful and dangerous consequences of breaking of them. And these are arguments fit to work upon mankind, because there is something within us that consents to the equity and reasonableness of GOD's laws. So that whenever we persuade men to their duty, how backward soever they may be to the practice of it, being strongly addicted to a contrary course, yet we have this certain advantage, that we have their consciences and the most inward sense of their minds on our side, bearing witness that what we counsel and persuade them to, is for their good.

And if need be we must add reproof to counsel. This our SAVIOUR did with great freedom, and some-

times with sharpness and severity, according to the condition of the persons he had to deal withal. But because of his great authority, being a teacher immediately sent from GOD, and of his intimate knowledge of the hearts of men, he is not a pattern to us in all the circumstances of discharging this duty; which, of any other, requires great prudence and discretion if we intend to do good, the only end to be aimed at in it. For many are fit to be reproved whom yet every man is not fit to reprove; and in that case we must get it done by those that are fit, and great regard must be had to the time and other circumstances of doing it, so as it may most probably have it's effect.

I will mention but one way of instruction more, and that is by making lasting provision for that purpose: as by founding schools of learning, especially to teach the poor to read, which is the key of knowledge; by building of churches and endowing them; by buying or giving in impropriations, or the like. These are large and lasting ways of teaching and instructing others, which will continue when we are dead and gone; as it is said of Abel, that "being dead he yet speaks." And this our SAVIOUR virtually did by appointing his apostles after he had left the world, to "go and teach all nations," and ordering a constant succession of teachers in his church to instruct men in the Christian religion, together with an honourable maintenance for them. This we cannot do in the way that he did, who had "all "power in heaven and earth," but we may be subservient to this design in the ways that I have mentioned. Which I humbly commend to the consideration

SERM. XVIII.

tion of those whom GOD hath blessed with great estates, and made capable of effecting such great works of charity.

Secondly, another way of doing good to the souls of men is by good example. And this our blessed SAVIOUR was in the utmost perfection. For he "fulfilled all righteousness, had no sin, neither was "guile found in his mouth." And this we should endeavour to be, as far as the frailty of our nature and imperfection of our present state will suffer. For good example is an unspeakable benefit to mankind, and hath a secret power and influence upon those with whom we converse, to form them into the same disposition and manners. It is a living rule, that teacheth men without trouble, and lets them see their faults without open reproof and upbraiding. Besides that it adds great weight to a man's counsel and persuasion, when we see that he advises nothing but what he does, nor exacts any thing from others from which he himself desires to be excused. As on the contrary, nothing is more cold and insignificant than good counsel from a bad man, one that does not obey his own precepts, nor follow the advice which he is so forward to give to others.

These are the several ways of doing good to the souls of men, wherein we who are the disciples of the blessed JESUS ought in imitation of his example to exercise our selves according to our several capacities and opportunities. And this is the noblest charity, and the greatest kindness that can be shewn to human nature; it is in the most excellent sense to "give "eyes to the blind, to set the prisoners at liberty," to rescue men out of the saddest slavery and captivity,

and

and to "save souls from death." And it is the most lasting and durable benefit, because it is to do good to all eternity. SERM. XVIII.

2. The other way of being beneficial to others is, by procuring their temporal good, and contributing to their happiness in this present life. And this, in subordination to our SAVIOUR's great design of bringing men to eternal happiness, was a great part of his business and employment in this world. He went about "healing all manner of sicknesses and diseases," and rescuing the bodies of men from the power and possession of the devil.

And though we cannot be beneficial to men in that miraculous manner that he was; yet we may be so in the use of ordinary means: we may comfort the afflicted, and vindicate the oppressed, and do a great many acts of charity which our SAVIOUR by reason of his poverty could not do without a miracle: we may supply the necessities of those that are in want, "feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and visit "the sick," and minister to them such comforts and remedies as they are not able to provide for themselves: we may take a child that is poor and destitute of all advantages of education and bring him up in the knowledge and fear of GOD, and without any great expence put him into a way wherein by his diligence and industry he may arrive to a considerable fortune in the world, and be able afterwards to relieve hundreds of others. Men glory in raising great and magnificent structures, and find a secret pleasure to see sets of their own planting to grow up and flourish: but surely it is a greater and more glorious work to build up a man, to see a youth of our own

SERM. XVIII.

planting, from the small beginnings and advantages we have given him, to grow up into a considerable fortune, to take root in the world and to shoot up to such a height and spread his branches so wide, that we who first planted him may ourselves find comfort and shelter under his shadow. We may many times with a small liberality shore up a family that is ready to fall, and struggles under such necessities that it is not able to support itself. And if our minds were as great as sometimes our estates are, we might do great and publick works of a general and lasting advantage, and for which many generations to come might call us blessed. And those who are in the lowest condition may do great good to others by their prayers, if they themselves be as good as they ought. For "the "fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." The intercession of those who are in favour with GOD (as all good men are) are not vain wishes, but many times effectual to procure that good for others which their own endeavours could never have effected and brought about.

I have done with the first thing. The great work and business which our blessed SAVIOUR had to do in the world, and that was to do good. I proceed to the

II. Second thing contained in the text, our SAVIOUR's diligence and industry in this work, "He "went about doing good." He made it the great business and constant employment of his life, he travelled from one place to another to seek out opportunities of being useful and beneficial to mankind. And this will fully appear if we briefly consider these following particulars:

First,

First, how unwearied our blessed SAVIOUR was in doing good. He made it his only business, and spent his whole life in it. He was not only ready to do good to those that came to him and gave him opportunity for it and besought him to do it, but went himself from one place to another to seek out objects to exercise his charity upon. He went to those who could not, and to those who would not come to him; for so it is written of him, "he came to seek and "to save that which was lost." He was contented to spend whole days in this work, to live in a croud, and to be almost perpetually oppress with company: and when his disciples were moved at the rudeness of the people in pressing upon him he rebuked their impatience, and, for the pleasure he took in doing good, made nothing of the trouble and inconvenience that attended it.

Secondly, if we consider how much he denied himself in the chief comforts and conveniencies of human life that he might do good to others. He neglected the ordinary refreshments of nature, his meat, and drink, and sleep, that he might attend this work. He was at every body's beck and dispofal to do them good. When he was doing cures in one place he was sent for to another, and he either went or sent healing to them, and did by his word at a distance what he could not come in person to do. Nay he was willing to deny himself in one of the dearest things in the world, his reputation and good name. He was contented to do good, though he was ill thought of and ill spoken of for it. He would not refuse to do good on the sabbath-day, though he was accounted profane for so doing. He knew how scandalous it was

SERM. XVIII.

among the Jews to keep company with publicans and sinners, and yet he would not decline so good a work for all the ill words they gave him for it.

Thirdly, if we consider the malicious opposition and sinister construction that his good deeds met with-al. Never did so much goodness meet with so much enmity, endure so many affronts and so much contradiction of sinners. This great benefactor of mankind was hated and persecuted as if he had been a publick enemy. While he was instructing them in the meekest manner, they were ready to stone him for telling them the truth: and when the fame of his miracles went abroad, though they were never so useful and beneficial to mankind, yet upon this very account they conspire against him and seek to take away his life. Whatever he said or did, though never so innocent, never so excellent, had some bad interpretation put upon it, and the great and shining virtues of his life were turned into crimes and matter of accusation. For his casting out of devils, he was called a magician; for his endeavour to reclaim men from their vices, "a friend of publicans "and sinners;" for his free and obliging conversation, "a wine-bibber and a glutton." All the benefits which he did to men, and the blessings which he so liberally shed among the people, were construed to be a design of ambition and popularity, and done with an intention to move the people to sedition, and to make himself a king: enough to have discouraged the greatest goodness, and have put a damp upon the most generous mind, and to make it sick and weary of well-doing. For what more grievous than to have all the good one does ill interpret-

ed,

ed, and the best actions in the world made matter of calumny and reproach? SERM. XVIII.

And then lastly, if we consider how chearfully, notwithstanding all this, he persevered and continued in well-doing. It was not only his business, but his delight: "I delight (says he) to do thy will, O my "God." The pleasure which others take in the most natural actions of life, in eating and drinking when they are hungry, he took in doing good, it was "his meat and drink to do the will of his father." He plied this work with so much diligence as if he had been afraid he should have wanted time for it. "I must work the work of him that sent me, while "it is day, the night cometh when no man can "work." And when he was approaching towards the hardest and most unpleasant part of his service, but of all others the most beneficial to us, I mean his death and sufferings, he was not at ease in his mind till it was done; "How am I straitned (says he) "till it be accomplished." And just before his suffering, with what joy and triumph does he reflect upon the good he had done in his life? "Father, I "have glorified thee upon earth, and finished the "work which thou hast given me to do." What a blessed pattern is here of diligence and industry in doing good? how fair and lovely a copy for Christians to write after?

And now that I have set it before you, it will be of excellent use to these two purposes: to shew us our defects; and to excite us to our duty.

I. To shew us our defects. How does this blessed example upbraid those who live in a direct contradiction to it; who, instead of "going about doing good,"

are

SERM. XVIII.

are perpetually intent upon doing mischief; who are wise and active to do evil, but to do good have no inclination, no understanding? And those likewise who, though they are far from being so bad, yet wholly neglect this blessed work of doing good? They think it very fair to do no evil, to hurt and injure no man: but if preachers will be so unreasonable as to require more, and will never be satisfied till they have persuaded them out of their estate, and to give to the poor till they have almost impoverished themselves, they desire to be excused from this importunity. But we are not so unreasonable neither. We desire to put them in mind, that to be charitable according to our power is an indispensable duty of religion: that we are commanded not only to abstain from evil, but to do good; and that our blessed SAVIOUR hath given us the example of both; he did not only do no sin, but he went about doing good. And upon this nice point it was that the young rich man in the gospel and his SAVIOUR parted. He had "kept the commandments from his youth, Thou "shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, "Thou shalt not steal:" he had been very careful of the negative part of religion; but, when it came to parting with his estate and giving to the poor, this he thought too hard a condition, and upon this he forsook our SAVIOUR and forfeited the kingdom of heaven. And it is very considerable, and ought to be often and seriously thought upon, that our SAVIOUR describing to us the day of judgment represents the great judge of the world acquitting and condemning men according to the good which they had done, or neglected to do in ways of mercy and charity; for feed-

ing the hungry, and clothing the naked, and visiting the sick, or for neglecting to do these things: than which nothing can more plainly and effectually declare to us the necessity of doing good, in order to the obtaining eternal happiness.

There are many indeed who do not altogether neglect the doing of this work, who yet do in a great measure prevent and hinder themselves from doing it as they ought, under a pretence of being employed about other duties and parts of religion. They are so taken up with the exercises of piety and devotion in private and publick, with prayer, and reading and hearing sermons, and preparing themselves for the sacrament, that they have scarce any leisure to mind the doing of good and charitable offices to others: or if they have, they hope GOD will pardon his servants in this thing, and accept of their piety and devotion instead of all. But they ought to consider, that when these two parts of religion come in competition, devotion is to give way to charity, mercy being better than sacrifice: that the great end of all the duties of religion, prayer, and reading and hearing the word of GOD, and receiving the holy sacrament, is to dispose and excite us to do good, to make us more ready and forward to every good work: and that it is the greatest mockery in the world, upon pretence of using the means of religion to neglect the end of it; and because we are always preparing our selves to do good, to think that we are for ever excused from doing any.

Others are taken up in contending for the faith, and spend all their zeal and heat about some controversies in religion; and therefore they think it but reason-

reasonable that they should be excused from those meaner kind of duties, because they serve GOD, as they imagine, in a higher and more excellent way; as those who serve the king in his wars use to be exempted from taxes and offices. But do those men consider upon what kind of duties more especially our blessed SAVIOUR and his apostles lay the great weight and stress of religion? that it is to the meek and merciful, and peaceable that our SAVIOUR pronounceth blessedness? that "pure religion and undefiled before GOD and the father is this, to visit the "fatherless and widows in their affliction?" that "the wisdom which is from above is full of mercy "and good works?" These are the great and weighty things of religion, which, whatever else we do, ought not to be left undone. Do they consider, that a right faith is wholly in order to a good life, and is of no value any farther than it hath an influence upon it? So that whatever other duties we may be obliged to, nothing can excuse us from this. How much better is it to do good, to be really useful and beneficial to others, and how much more clearly and certainly our duty, than to quarrel about doubtful and uncertain opinions? Were men Christians indeed, they would be so much delighted and taken up with this better work, (more acceptable to GOD, and more profitable to men) that they could not find leisure, or if they could, they could not find in their hearts to employ all their time and zeal about things which are at so great a distance from the life and heart of religion, as most of those questions are which Christians at this day contend and languish about. Were we possessed with the true spirit of Christianity,

these

these would be but dry and insipid and tastless things to us, in comparison of the blessed employment of doing good in a more real and substantial way. If the sincere love of GOD and our neighbour were but once throughly kindled in our hearts, these pure and heavenly flames would in a great measure extinguish the unchristian heats of dispute and contention; as fires here below are ready to languish and go out, when the sun in his full strength shines upon them. SERM. XVIII.

II. But the hardest part of my task is yet behind, and it is strange it should be so; and that is to persuade us to the imitation of this blessed example. Let us "go and do likewise; let the same mind be in us "that was in CHRIST JESUS;" let us tread in the steps of the great GOD and the best man that ever was, our blessed SAVIOUR, who "went about doing good." Methinks the work it self is of that nature, that men should not need to be courted to it by persuasion, nor urged by importunity. The very proposal of the thing, and the pattern which I have set before you, is temptation and allurement enough to a generous and well-disposed mind. But yet to inflame you the more to so good a work, be pleased to dwell with me a little upon these following considerations:

First, it is an argument of a great and generous mind, to employ our selves in doing good, to extend our thoughts and care to the concernments of others, and to use our power and endeavours for their benefit and advantage; because it shews an inclination and desire in us to have others happy as well as our selves.

Those who are of a narrow and envious spirit, of a mean and sordid disposition, love to contract them-

selves within themselves, and like the hedgehog to shoot out their quills at every one that comes near them. They take care of no body but themselves, and foolishly think their own happiness the greater because they have it alone and to themselves. But the noblest and most heavenly dispositions think themselves happiest when others share with them in their happiness. Of all beings GOD is the fartheſt removed from envy, and the nearer any creature approacheth to him in blessedness the farther is it off from this hellish quality and disposition. It is the temper of the devil to grudge happiness to others; he envied that man should be in paradise when he was cast out of heaven.

Other perfections are (as one says) of a more melancholic and solitary disposition, and shine brightest when they are alone, or attained to but by a few; once make them common and they lose their lustre. But it is the nature of goodness to communicate it self, and the farther it spreads the more glorious it is. GOD reckons it as one of his most glorious titles, as the brightest gem in his diadem, "the LORD mighty "to save." He delights not to shew his sovereignty in ruining the innocent and destroying helpless creatures; but in rescuing them out of the jaws of hell and destruction. To the devil belongs the title of the destroyer.

Without this quality of goodness all other perfections would change their nature, and lose their excellency. Great power and wisdom would be terrible, and raise nothing but dread and suspicion in us: for power without goodness would be tyranny and oppression, and wisdom would become craft and treachery.

treachery. A being endued with knowledge and power, and yet wanting goodness, would be nothing else but an irresistible evil, and an omnipotent mischief. We admire knowledge, and are afraid of power, and suspect wisdom: but we can heartily love nothing but goodness, or such perfections as are in conjunction with it. For knowledge and power may be in a nature most contrary to God's; the devil hath these perfections in an excelling degree. When all is done, nothing argues a great and generous mind but only goodness; which is a propension and disposition to make others happy, and a readiness to do them all the good offices we can.

Secondly, to do good is the most pleasant employment in the world. It is natural; and whatever is so is delightful. We do like our selves whenever we relieve the wants and distresses of others. And therefore this virtue among all other hath peculiarly entitled itself to the name of humanity. We answer our own nature, and obey our reason, and shew our selves men, in shewing mercy to the miserable. Whenever we consider the evils and afflictions of others, we do with the greatest reason collect our duty from our nature and inclination, and make our own wishes and desires and expectations from others a law and rule to our selves. And this is pleasant, to follow our nature, and to gratify the importunate dictates of our own reason. So that the benefits we do to others are not more welcome to them that receive them, than they are delightful to us that do them. We ease our own nature and bowels whenever we help and relieve those who are in want and necessity. As on the contrary, no man that hath not

SERM. XVIII.

divested himself of humanity can be cruel and hard-hearted to others without feeling some pain in himself. There is no sensual pleasure in the world comparable to the delight and satisfaction that a good man takes in doing good. This Cato in Tully boasts of as the great comfort and joy of his old age, "that "nothing was more pleasant to him than the con- "science of a well-spent life, and the remembrance "of many benefits and kindnesses done to others." Sensual pleasures are not lasting, but presently vanish and expire: but that is not the worst of them, they leave a sting behind them, as the pleasure goes off,

——*Succedit frigida cura.*

Sadness and melancholy come in the place of it, guilt and trouble and repentance follow it. But the pleasure of doing good remains after a thing is done, the thoughts of it lie easy in our minds, and the reflection upon it afterwards does for ever minister joy and delight to us. In a word, that frame of mind which inclines us to do good is the very temper and disposition of happiness. Solomon, after all his experience of worldly pleasures, pitches at last upon this as the greatest felicity of human life, and the only good use that is to be made of a prosperous and plentiful fortune, Eccl. iii. 12. "I know that there is no good "in them, but for a man to rejoice and do good in "his life." And a greater and a wiser than Solomon hath said, that "it is more blessed to give than "to receive."

Thirdly, to employ ourselves in doing good is to imitate the highest excellency and perfection: it is to be like GOD "who is good and doth good," and to

be like him in that which he esteems his greatest glory, and that is, his goodness. It is to be like the Son of GOD, who when he took our nature upon him, and lived in the world, "went about doing good." It is to be like the blessed angels, whose great employment is to be "ministring spirits for the good of others." To be charitable and helpful and beneficial to others, is to be a good angel, and a saviour and a god to men. And the example of our blessed SAVIOUR more especially is the great pattern which our religion propounds to us. And we have all the reason in the world to be in love with it; because that very goodness which it propounds to our imitation, was so beneficial to ourselves: when we ourselves feel and enjoy the happy effects of that good which he did in the world, this should mightily endear the example to us, and make us forward to imitate that love and kindness to which we are indebted for so many blessings, and upon which all our hopes of happiness do depend.

And there is this considerable difference between our SAVIOUR's charity to us, and ours to others: he did all purely for our sakes and for our benefit, whereas all the good we do to others is a greater good done to ourselves. They indeed are beholden to us for the kindness we do them, and we to them for the opportunity of doing it. Every ignorant person that comes in our way to be instructed by us, every sinner whom we reclaim, every poor man we relieve, is a happy opportunity of doing good to ourselves, and of "laying up for ourselves a good treasure a-"gainst the time which is to come, that we may lay "hold on eternal life." By this principle the best

and

and the happiest man that ever was governed his life and actions, esteeming it "a more blessed thing to "give than to receive."

Fourthly, this is one of the greatest and most substantial duties of religion; and, next to the love and honour which we pay to GOD himself, the most acceptable service that we can perform to him. It is one half of the law, and next to the first and great commandment, and very like unto it: like to it in the excellency of it's nature, and in the necessity of it's obligation. For "this commandment we have from "him, that he who loveth GOD love his brother al-"so." The first commandment excels in the dignity of the object; but the second hath the advantage in the reality of it's effects. For "our righteousness "extendeth not to GOD," we can do him no real benefit; but our charity to men is really useful and beneficial to them. For which reason GOD is contented, in many cases, that the external honour and worship, which by his positive command he requires of us, should give way to that natural duty of love and mercy which we owe to one another. And to shew how great a value he puts upon charity, he hath made it the great testimony of our love to himself; and for want of it, rejects all other professions of love to him as false and insincere. "If any man say, I love GOD, "and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that "loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how "can he love GOD whom he hath not seen?"

Fifthly, this is that which will give us the greatest comfort when we come to die. It will then be no pleasure to men to reflect upon the great estates they have got, and the great places they have been advanced

advanced to, because they are leaving these things, and they will stand them in no stead in the other world: "Riches profit not in the day of wrath:" but the conscience of well-doing will refresh our souls even under the very pangs of death. With what contentment does a good man then look upon the good he hath done in this life? and with what confidence doth he look over into the other world, where he hath provided for himself "bags that wax not old, a trea-"sure in the heavens that faileth not?" For though our estates will not follow us into the other world, our good works will; though we cannot carry our riches along with us, yet we may send them before us to make way for our reception into everlasting habitations. In short, works of mercy and charity will comfort us at the hour of death, and plead for us at the day of Judgment, and procure for us at the hands of a merciful GOD a glorious recompence at the resurrection of the just. Which leads me to the

Last consideration I shall offer to you; which is the reward of doing good both in this world and the other. If we believe GOD himself, he hath made more particular and encouraging promises to this grace and virtue than to any other.

The advantages of it in this world are many and great. It is the way to derive a lasting blessing upon our estates. Acts of charity are the best deeds of settlement. We gain the prayers and blessings of those to whom we extend our charity, and it is no small thing to have "the blessing of them that are ready to perish "to come upon us." For GOD "hears the prayers "of the destitute, and his ear is open to their cry." Charity is a great security to us in times of evil: and

that

SERM. XVIII.

that not only from the special promise and providence of God, which are engaged to preserve from want those that relieve the necessities of others; but likewise from the nature of the thing, which makes way for it's own reward in this world. He that is charitable to others provides a supply and retreat for himself in the day of distress: for he provokes mankind by his example to like tenderness towards him, and prudently bespeaks the commiseration of others against it comes to be his turn to stand in need of it. Nothing in this world makes a man more and surer friends than charity and bounty, and such as will stand by us in the greatest troubles and dangers. "For a "good man (says the apostle) one would even dare to "die." 'Tis excellent counsel of the son of Sirach; "Lay up thy treasure according to the command- "ment of the most High, and it shall bring thee "more profit than gold. Shut up thy alms in thy "storehouse, and it shall deliver thee from all afflic- "tion: it shall fight for thee against thine enemies, "better than a mighty shield and strong spear." It hath sometimes happened that the obligation that men have laid upon others by their charity, hath in case of danger and extremity done them more kindness than all the rest of their estate could do for them; and their alms have literally delivered them from death.

But what is all this to the endless and unspeakable happiness of the next life, where the returns of doing good will be vastly great, beyond what we can now expect or imagine! for God takes all the good we do to others as a debt upon himself, and he hath estate and treasure enough to satisfy the greatest obligations

we

we can lay upon him. So that we have the truth, and goodness, and sufficiency of God for our security, that what we scatter and sow in this kind will grow up to a plentiful harvest in the other world; and that all our pains and expence in doing good for a few days will be recompensed and crowned with the joys and glories of eternity.

SERMON XIX.

On the fifth of November, 1678. Before the honourable house of commons.

LUKE ix. 55, 56.

But he turned and rebuked them, and said, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.

SERM. XIX.

AMong many other things, which may justly recommend the Christian religion to the approbation of mankind, the intrinsick goodness of it is most apt to make impression upon the minds of serious and considerate men. The miracles of it are the great external evidence and confirmation of it's truth and divinity; but the morality of it's doctrines and precepts, so agreeable to the best reason and wisest apprehensions of mankind, so admirably fitted for the perfecting of our natures, and the sweetning of the spirits and tempers of men, so friendly to human

ſociety, and every way ſo well calculated for the peace and order of the world: theſe are the things which our religion glories in, as her crown and excellency. Miracles are apt to awaken and aſtoniſh, and by a ſenſible and over-powering evidence to bear down the prejudices of infidelity; but there are ſecret charms in goodneſs, which take faſt hold of the hearts of men, and do inſenſibly, but effectually, command our love and eſteem.

And ſurely nothing can be more proper to the occaſion of this day, than a diſcourſe upon this argument; which ſo directly tends to correct that unchriſtian ſpirit, and miſtaken zeal, which hath been the cauſe of all our troubles and confuſions, and had ſo powerful an influence upon that horrid tragedy which was deſigned, now near upon fourſcore years ago, to have been acted as upon this day.

And that we may the better underſtand the reaſon of our SAVIOUR's reproof here in the text, it will be requiſite to conſider the occaſion of this hot and furious zeal which appeared in ſome of his diſciples. And that was this: our SAVIOUR was going from Galilee to Jeruſalem, and being to paſs through a village of Samaria, he ſent meſſengers before him to prepare entertainment for him; but the people of that place would not receive him, becauſe he was going to Jeruſalem: the reaſon whereof was, the difference of religion which then was between the Jews and the Samaritans. Of which I ſhall give you this brief account.

The Samaritans were originally that colony of the Aſſyrians, which we find in the book of Kings was, upon the captivity of the ten tribes, planted in Samaria

maria by Salmanasser. They were heathens, and worshipped their own idols, till they were so infested with lions, that for the redress of this mischief they desired to be instructed in the worship of the GOD of Israel, hoping by this means to appease the anger of the god of the country; and then they worshipped the GOD of Israel together with their own idols; for so it is said in the history of the Kings, "that they "feared the LORD, and served their own gods." SERM. XIX.

After the tribe of Judah were returned from the captivity of Babylon, and the temple of Jerusalem was rebuilt, all the Jews were obliged by a solemn covenant to put away their heathen wives. It happened that Manasses, a Jewish priest, had married the daughter of Sanballat the Samaritan; and being unwilling to put away his wife, Sanballat excited the Samaritans to build a temple upon mount Gerizim near the city of Samaria, in opposition to the temple at Jerusalem, and made Manasses his son in law priest there.

Upon the building of this new temple there arose a great feud between the Jews and Samaritans, which in process of time grew to so violent a hatred, that they would not so much as shew common civility to one another. And this was the reason why the Samaritans would not receive our SAVIOUR in his journey, because they perceived he was going to worship at Jerusalem.

At this uncivil usage of our SAVIOUR, two of his disciples, James and John, presently take fire, and out of a well meaning zeal for the honour of their master, and of the true GOD, and of Jerusalem the true place of his worship, they are immediately for dis-

patching out of the way these enemies of GOD, and CHRIST, and the true religion; these heretics and schismaticks, for so they called one another. And to this end they desire our SAVIOUR to give them power to "call for fire from heaven to consume "them," as Elias had done in a like case, and that too not far from Samaria; and it is not improbable that their being so near the place where Elias had done the like before, might prompt them to this request.

Our SAVIOUR seeing them in this heat, notwithstanding all the reasons they pretended for their passion, and for all they sheltered themselves under the great example of Elias, doth very calmly but severely reprove this temper of theirs, "ye know not what "manner of spirit ye are of: for the son of man is "not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them."

Grotius observes, that these two excellent sentences are left out in a manuscript that is in England. I cannot tell what manuscript he refers to; but if it were a copy written out in the height of popery, no wonder if some zealous transcriber, offended at this passage, struck it out of the gospel, being confident our SAVIOUR would not say any thing, that was so directly contrary to the current doctrine and practice of those times. But thanks be to GOD, this admirable saying is still preserved, and can never be made use of upon a fitter occasion.

"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of:" that is, ye own your selves to be my disciples, but do you consider what spirit now acts and governs you; not that surely which my doctrine designs to mould and fashion you into, which is not a furious and persecuting

ſecuting and deſtructive ſpirit, but mild and gentle and ſaving; tender of the lives and intereſts of men, even of thoſe who are our greateſt enemies: you ought to conſider, that you are not now under the rough and ſour diſpenſation of the law, but the calm and peaceable inſtitution of the goſpel; to which the ſpirit of Elias, though he was a very good man in his time, would be altogether unſuitable. GOD permitted it then, under that imperfect way of religion, but now under the goſpel it would be intolerable: for that deſigns univerſal love, and peace, and good will: and now no difference of religion, no pretence of zeal for GOD and CHRIST can warrant and juſtify this paſſionate and fierce, this vindictive and exterminating ſpirit. SERM. XIX.

"For the ſon of man is not come to deſtroy mens "lives, but to ſave them." He ſays indeed elſewhere, that he "was not come to ſend peace, but a "ſword;" which we are not to underſtand of the natural tendency of his religion, but of the accidental event and effect of it, through the malice and perverſeneſs of men: but here he ſpeaks of the proper intention and deſign of his coming: he came not to kill and deſtroy, but "for the healing of the na-"tions;" for the ſalvation and redemption of mankind, not only "from the wrath to come," but from a great part of the evils and miſeries of this life: he came to diſcountenance all fierceneſs and rage and cruelty in men, one towards another; to reſtrain and ſubdue that furious and unpeaceable ſpirit, which is ſo troubleſom to the world, and the cauſe of ſo many miſchiefs and diſorders in it: and to introduce a religion which conſults not only the eternal ſalvation

of

SERM. XIX.

of mens ſouls, but their temporal peace and ſecurity, their comfort and happineſs in this world.

The words thus explained contain this obſervation, " that a revengeful and cruel and deſtructive ſpi- " rit, is directly contrary to the deſign and temper of " the goſpel, and not to be excuſed upon any pre- " tence of zeal for GOD and religion."

In the proſecution of this argument, I ſhall confine my diſcourſe to theſe three heads.

Firſt, to ſhew the oppoſition of this ſpirit to the true ſpirit and deſign of the Chriſtian religion.

Secondly, the unjuſtifiableneſs of it upon any pretence of zeal for GOD and religion.

Thirdly, to apply this diſcourſe to the occaſion of this day.

Firſt, I ſhall ſhew the oppoſition of this ſpirit to the true ſpirit and deſign of the Chriſtian religion: that it is directly oppoſite to the main and fundamental precepts of the goſpel, and to the great patterns and examples of our religion, our bleſſed SAVIOUR, and the primitive Chriſtians.

1. This ſpirit which our SAVIOUR here reproves in his diſciples, is directly oppoſite to the main and fundamental precepts of the goſpel; which command us to " love one another, and to love all men," even our very enemies; and are ſo far from permitting us to perſecute thoſe who hate us, that they forbid us to hate thoſe who perſecute us: they require us to be " merciful as our father which is in heaven is mer- " ciful;" to be " kind and tender-hearted, forbear- " ing one another, and forgiving one another, if any " man have a quarrel againſt any, even as GOD for " CHRIST's ſake hath forgiven us:" and " to put " on

" on as the elect of GOD, bowels of mercy, meekneſs SERM. XIX.
" and long-ſuffering," and to " follow peace with
" all men," and to " ſhew all meekneſs to all men ;"
and particularly the paſtors and governors of the church are eſpecially charged to be of this temper, " the ſervant of the LORD muſt not ſtrive, but be " gentle unto all men ; apt to teach, in meekneſs " inſtructing thoſe that oppoſe themſelves, if peradventure GOD will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth." To all which precepts, and many more that I might reckon up, nothing can be more plainly oppoſite than inhuman cruelties and perſecutions, treacherous conſpiracies and bloody maſſacres, a barbarous inquiſition, and a holy league to extirpate all that differ from us. And inſtead of " inſtructing in meekneſs thoſe that oppoſe " themſelves," to convert men with fire and faggot, and to teach them as Gideon did the men of Succoth with briars and thorns ; and inſtead of waiting for their repentance, and endeavouring to recover them out of the ſnare of the devil, to put them quick into his hands, and to diſpatch them to hell as faſt as is poſſible. If the precepts of Chriſtianity can be contradicted, ſurely it cannot be done more groſly and palpably than by ſuch practices.

2. This ſpirit is likewiſe directly oppoſite to the great patterns and examples of our religion, our bleſſed SAVIOUR, and the primitive Chriſtians. It was propheſied of our SAVIOUR that he ſhould be the prince of peace, and ſhould make it one of his great buſineſſes upon earth, to make peace in heaven and earth, to reconcile men to GOD and to one another, to take up all thoſe feuds, and to extinguiſh all thoſe animoſi-

SERM. XIX.

animosities that were in the world; to bring to an agreement and a peaceable demeanour one towards another those that were most distant in their tempers and interests; to "make the lamb and the wolf lie down "together, that there might be no more destroying "nor devouring in all GOD's holy mountain;" that is, that that cruel and destructive spirit, which prevailed before in the world, should then be banished out of all Christian societies.

And in conformity to these predictions, when our SAVIOUR was born into the world, the angels sang that heavenly anthem, "glory to GOD in the high-"est, peace on earth, and good will among men." And when he appeared in the world, his whole life and carriage was gentle and peaceable, full of meekness and charity. His great business was to be beneficial to others, to seek and to save that which was lost; "he went about doing good," to the bodies and to the souls of men: his miracles were not destructive to mankind, but healing and charitable. He could, if he had pleased, by his miraculous power have confounded his enemies, and have thundred out death and destruction against the infidel world, as his pretended vicar hath since done against hereticks. But intending that his religion should be propagated in human ways, and that men should be drawn to the profession of it by the bands of love, and the cords of a man, by the gentle and peaceable methods of reason and persuasion; he gave no example of a furious zeal and religious rage against those who despised his doctrine. It was propounded to men for their great advantage, and they rejected it at their utmost peril. It seemed good to the author of this in-

ſtitution to compel no man to it by temporal puniſh- SERM. XIX.
ments. When he went about making proſelytes he offered violence to no man, only ſaid, "If any man "will be my diſciple, if any man will come after "me." And when his diſciples were leaving him, he does not ſet up an inquiſition to torture and puniſh them for their defection from the faith, only ſays, "will ye alſo go away?

And in imitation of this bleſſed pattern the Chriſtian church continued to ſpeak and act for ſeveral ages. And this was the language of the holy fathers, *Lex nova non ſe vindicat ultore gladio*, "the Chriſtian law doth "not avenge it ſelf by the ſword." This was then the ſtile of councils, *Nemini ad credendum vim inferre*, "to offer violence to no man to compel him to the faith." I proceed in the

II. Second place, to ſhew the unjuſtifiableneſs of this ſpirit upon any pretence whatſoever of zeal for GOD and religion. No caſe can be put with circumſtances of greater advantage and more likely to juſtify this ſpirit and temper, than the caſe here in the text. Thoſe againſt whom the diſciples would have called for fire from heaven, were hereticks and ſchiſmaticks from the true church; they had affronted our SAVIOUR himſelf in his own perſon; the honour of GOD, and of that religion which he had ſet up in the world, and of Jeruſalem which he had appointed for the place of his worſhip, were all concerned in this caſe: ſo that if ever it were warrantable to put on this fierce and furious zeal, here was a caſe that ſeemed to require it: but even in theſe circumſtances our SAVIOUR thinks fit to rebuke and diſcountenance this ſpirit, "ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of."

And he gives such a reason as ought in all differences of religion, how wide soever they be, to deter men from this temper, "for the son of man is not come "to destroy mens lives, but to save them;" that is, this spirit is utterly inconsistent with the great design of Christian religion, and the end of our SAVIOUR's coming into the world.

And now, what hath the church of Rome to plead for her cruelty to men for the cause of religion, which the disciples might not much better have pleaded for themselves in their case? What hath she to say against those who are the objects of her cruelty and persecution, which would not have held against the Samaritans? Does she practise these severities out of a zeal for truth, and for the honour of GOD, and CHRIST, and the true religion? Why, upon these very accounts it was, that the disciples would have called for fire from heaven to have destroyed the Samaritans. Is the church of Rome persuaded that those whom she persecutes are hereticks and schismaticks, and that no punishment can be too great for such offenders? So the disciples were persuaded of the Samaritans; and upon much better grounds: only the disciples had some excuse in their case, which the church of Rome had not; and that was ignorance: and this apology our SAVIOUR makes for them, "ye know "not what manner of spirit ye are of:" they had been bred up in the Jewish religion, which gave some indulgence to this kind of temper, and they were able to cite a great example for themselves; besides, they were then but learners and not thoroughly instructed in the Christian doctrine. But in the church of Rome, whatever the case of particular persons may

may be, as to the whole church and the governing part of it, this ignorance is wilful and affected, and therefore inexcuſable. For the Chriſtian religion, which they profeſs to embrace, does as plainly teach the contrary as it does any other matter whatſoever: and it is not more evident in the new teſtament that CHRIST died for ſinners, than that Chriſtians ſhould not kill one another, for the miſbelief of any article of revealed religion; much leſs for the diſbelief of ſuch articles as are invented by men, and impoſed as the doctrines of CHRIST.

You have heard what kind of ſpirit it is, which our SAVIOUR here reproves in his diſciples. It was a furious and deſtructive ſpirit, contrary to Chriſtian charity and goodneſs. But yet this may be ſaid in mitigation of their fault, that they themſelves offered no violence to their enemies: they left it to GOD, and no doubt would have been very glad that he would have manifeſted his ſeverity upon them, by ſending down "fire from heaven" to have conſumed them.

But there is a much worſe ſpirit than this in the world, which is not only contrary to Chriſtianity, but to the common principles of natural religion, and even to humanity itſelf; which by falſhood and perfidiouſneſs, by ſecret plots and conſpiracies, or by open ſedition and rebellion, by an inquiſition or maſſacre, by depoſing and killing kings, by fire and ſword, by the ruin of their country, and betraying it into the hands of foreigners: and in a word, by diſſolving all the bonds of human ſociety, and ſubverting the peace and order of the world, that is, by all the wicked ways imaginable, doth incite men both to promote and to advance their religion. As if all the

SERM. XIX.

world were made for them, and there were not only no other Christians, but no other men besides themselves; as Babylon of old proudly vaunted, "I am, "and there is none besides me:" and as if the God, whom the Christians worship, were not "the God of "order but of confusion;" as if he whom we call "the Father of mercies," were delighted with cruelty, and could not have a more pleasing sacrifice offered to him than a massacre, nor put a greater honour upon his priests than to make them judges of an inquisition, that is, the inventors and decreers of torments for men more righteous and innocent than themselves.

Thus to misrepresent God and religion, is to divest them of all their majesty and glory. For if that of Seneca be true, that *sine bonitate nulla majestas*, "without goodness there can be no such thing as "majesty," then to separate goodness and mercy from God, compassion and charity from religion, is to make the two best things in the world, God and religion, good for nothing.

How much righter apprehensions had the heathens of the divine nature, which they looked upon as so benign and beneficial to mankind, that (as Tully admirably says) *Dii immortales ad usum hominum fabrefacti penè videantur*, "the nature of the immortal "gods may almost seem to be exactly framed for the "benefit and advantage of men." And as for religion, they always spake of it as of the great band of human society, and the foundation of truth and fidelity, and justice among men. But when religion once comes to supplant moral righteousness, and to teach men the absurdest things in the world, "to lie for the "truth, and to kill men for God's sake:" when it

SERM. XIX.

it ſerves to no other purpoſe, but to be a bond of conſpiracy, to inflame the tempers of men to a greater fierceneſs, and to ſet a keener edge upon their ſpirits, and to make them "ten times more the chil-" dren of wrath and cruelty than they were by na-" ture," then ſurely it loſes it's nature, and ceaſes to be religion: for let any man ſay worſe of atheiſm and infidelity, if he can. And, for GOD's ſake, what is religion good for, but to reform the manners and diſpoſitions of men, to reſtrain human nature from violence and cruelty, from falſhood and treachery, from ſedition and rebellion? Better it were there were no revealed religion, and that human nature were left to the conduct of it's own principles and inclinations, which are much more mild and merciful, much more for the peace and happineſs of human ſociety; than to be acted by a religion that inſpires men with ſo wild a fury, and prompts them to commit ſuch outrages: and is continually ſupplanting government, and undermining the welfare of mankind; in ſhort, ſuch a religion as teaches men to propagate and advance itſelf by means ſo evidently contrary to the very nature and end of all religion.

And this, if it be well conſidered, will appear to be a very convincing way of reaſoning, by ſhewing the laſt reſult and conſequence of ſuch principles, and of ſuch a train of propoſitions, to be a moſt groſs and palpable abſurdity. For example, we will at preſent admit popery to be the true religion, and their doctrines of extirpating hereticks, of the lawfulneſs of depoſing kings, and ſubverting government by all the cruel and wicked ways that can be thought of, to be, as in truth they are, the doctrines

SERM. XIX.

of this religion: in this case, I would not trouble myself to debate particulars: but if in the gross, and upon the whole matter it be evident that such a religion as this is as bad or worse than infidelity and no religion, this is conviction enough to a wise man, and as good as a demonstration, that this is not the true religion, and that it cannot be from GOD.

How much better teachers of religion were the old heathen philosophers? In all whose books and writings there is not one principle to be found of treachery or rebellion: nothing that gives the least countenance to an assassination or a massacre, to the betraying of one's native country, or the cutting of his neighbour's throat for difference in opinion. I speak it with grief and shame, because the credit of our common Christianity is somewhat concerned in it, that Panætius and Antipater and Diogenes the Stoick, Tully and Plutarch and Seneca were much honester and more Christian casuists, than the Jesuits are, or the generality of the casuists of any other order, that I know of, in the church of Rome. I come now in the

III. Third and last place, to make some application of this discourse.

1. Let not religion suffer for those faults and miscarriages which really proceed from the ignorance of religion, and from the want of it. That under colour and pretence of religion, very bad things are done, is no argument that religion itself is not good: because the best things are liable to be perverted and abused to very ill purposes, nay the corruption of them is commonly the worst; as, they say, the richest and noblest wines make the sharpest vinegar. "If the light that is in you," saith our SAVIOUR, "be darkness, how great is that darkness?" 2. Let

2. Let us beware of that church which countenanceth this unchriſtian ſpirit here condemned by our SAVIOUR; and which teaches us ſuch doctrines, and warrants ſuch practices as are conſonant thereto. You all know, without my ſaying ſo, that I mean the church of Rome; in which are taught ſuch doctrines as theſe, that hereticks, that is, all who differ from them in matters of faith, are to be extirpated by fire and ſword; which was decreed in the third and fourth Lateran councils, where all Chriſtians are ſtrictly charged to endeavour this to the uttermoſt of their power, *ſicut reputari cupiunt & haberi fideles*, "as they deſire to be eſteemed and accounted Chri-"ſtians." Next their doctrines of depoſing kings, and of abſolving their ſubjects from obedience to them; which are not only univerſally believed, but practiſed by the popes and Roman church for ſeveral ages. Indeed this doctrine hath not been at all times alike frankly and openly avowed, but it is undoubtedly theirs; and hath frequently been put in execution, though they have not thought it ſo convenient at all turns to make profeſſion of it. It is a certain kind of engine, which is to be ſcrew'd up or let down as occaſion ſerves; and is commonly kept like Goliah's ſword in the ſanctuary behind the ephod, but yet ſo that the high-prieſt can lend it out upon an extraordinary occaſion.

And for practices conſonant to theſe doctrines, I ſhall go no farther than the horrid and bloody deſign of this day. Such a myſtery of iniquity, as had been hid from ages and generations; ſuch a maſterpiece of villainy, as eye had not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor ever before entred into the heart of man: ſo prodigiouſly

SERM. XIX.

digiouſly barbarous, both in the ſubſtance and circumſtances of it, as is not to be parallel'd in all the voluminous records of time, from the foundation of the world.

Of late years our adverſaries (for ſo they have made themſelves without any provocation of ours) have almoſt had the impudence to deny ſo plain a matter of fact; but I wiſh they have not taken an effectual courſe by freſh conſpiracies, of equal or greater horror, to confirm the belief of it with a witneſs. But I ſhall not anticipate what will be more proper for another day, but confine my ſelf to the preſent occaſion.

I will not trouble you with the particular narrative of this dark conſpiracy, nor the obſcure manner of it's diſcovery, which Bellarmine himſelf acknowledges not to have been without a miracle. Let us thank GOD that it was ſo happily diſcovered and diſappointed, as I hope their preſent deſign will be by the ſame wonderful and merciful providence of GOD towards a moſt unworthy people. And may the lameneſs and halting of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jeſuits, never depart from that order, but be a fate continually attending all their villainous plots and contrivances.

I ſhall only obſerve to you, that after the diſcovery of this plot the authors of it were not convinced of the evil, but ſorry for the miſcarriage of it. Sir Everard Digby, whoſe very original papers and letters are now in my hands, after he was in priſon, and knew he muſt ſuffer, calls it the beſt cauſe; and was extremely troubled to hear it cenſured by catholics and prieſts, contrary to his expectation, for a great ſin: "let me tell you, ſays he, what a grief it is

"to

" to hear that ſo much condemned, which I did be- SERM. XIX.
lieve would have been otherwiſe thought of by ca-
" tholicks." And yet he concludes that letter with theſe words: " in how full joy ſhould I die, if I could
" do any thing for the cauſe which I love more than
" my life!" And in another letter he ſays, he could have ſaid ſomething to have mitigated the odium of this buſineſs, as to that point of involving thoſe of his own religion in the common ruin, " I dare not
" (ſays he) take that courſe that I could, to make it
" appear leſs odious, for divers were to have been
" brought out of danger, who now would rather
" hurt them otherwiſe. I do not think there would
" have been three worth the ſaving, that ſhould
" have been loſt." And as to the reſt, that were to have been ſwallowed up in that deſtruction, he ſeems not to have the leaſt relenting in his mind about them. All doubts he ſeems to have looked upon as temptations, and intreats his friends " to pray for the
" pardoning of his not ſufficient ſtriving againſt
" temptations ſince this buſineſs was undertook."

Good GOD! that any thing that is called religion, ſhould ſo perfectly ſtrip men of all humanity, and transform the mild and gentle race of mankind into ſuch wolves and tygers: that ever a pretended zeal for thy glory ſhould inſtigate men to diſhonour thee at ſuch a rate! It is believed by many, and not without cauſe, that the pope and his faction are the antichriſt. I will ſay no more than I know in this matter; I am not ſo ſure that it is he that is particularly deſigned in ſcripture by that name, as I am of the main articles of the Chriſtian faith: but however that be, I challenge antichriſt himſelf, whoever he be, and whenever he comes, to do worſe and wickeder things than theſe.

SERM. XIX.

But I must remember my text, and take heed of imitating that spirit which is there condemned, whilst I am inveighing against it. And in truth it almost looks uncharitably to speak the truth in these matters, and barely to relate what these men have not blushed to do. I need not, nay I cannot, aggravate these things; they are too horrible in themselves, even when they are expressed in the softest and gentlest words.

I would not be understood to charge every particular person who is, or hath been in the Roman communion, with the guilt of these or the like practices: But I must charge their doctrines and principles with them: I must charge the heads of their church, and the prevalent teaching and governing part of it, who are usually the contrivers and abetters, the executioners and applauders of these cursed designs.

I do willingly acknowledge the great piety and charity of several persons who have lived and died in that communion, as Erasmus, father Paul, Thuanus, and many others; who had in truth more goodness than the principles of that religion do either incline men to, or allow of. And yet he that considers how universally almost the papists in Ireland were engaged in that massacre, which is still fresh in our memories, will find it very hard to determine how many degrees of innocency and good-nature, or of coldness and indifferency in religion, are necessary to overbalance the fury of a blind zeal and a misguided conscience.

I doubt not but papists are made like other men. Nature hath not generally given them such savage and cruel dispositions, but their religion hath made them so. Whereas true Christianity is not only the best,

best, but the best-natured institution in the world; and so far as any church is departed from good-nature, and become cruel and barbarous, so far is it degenerated from Christianity. I am loth to say it, and yet I am confident 'tis very true, that many papists would have been excellent persons and very good men, if their religion had not hindered them; if the doctrines and principles of their church had not perverted and spoiled their natural dispositions.

I speak not this to exasperate you, worthy patriots and the great bulwark of our religion, to any unreasonable or unnecessary, much less unchristian severities against them: no, let us not do like them; let us never do any thing for religion that is contrary to it: but I speak it to awaken your care thus far, that if their priests will always be putting these pernicious principles into the minds of the people, effectual provision may be made, that it may never be in their power again to put them in practice. We have found by experience, that ever since the reformation they have been continually pecking at the foundations of our peace and religion: when God knows we have been so far from thirsting after their blood, that we did not so much as desire their disquiet but in order to our own necessary safety, and indeed to theirs.

And God be praised for those matchless instances which we are able to give of the generous humanity and Christian temper of the English protestants. After Q. Mary's death, when the protestant religion was restored, bishop Bonner, notwithstanding all his cruelties and butcheries, was permitted quietly to live and die amongst us. And after the treason of this day, nay at this very time, since the discovery of so

SERM. XIX.

barbarous a design, and the highest provocation in the world, by the treacherous murder of one of his majesty's justices of the peace, a very good man and a most excellent magistrate, who had been active in the discovery of this plot; I say, after all this, and notwithstanding the continued and insupportable insolence of their carriage and behaviour, even upon this occasion, no violence, nay not so much as any incivility, that I ever heard of, hath been offered to any of them. I would to GOD they would but seriously consider this one difference between our religion and theirs, and which of them comes nearest "to the "wisdom which is from above," which is peaceable, and gentle, and full of mercy. And I do heartily pray, and have good hopes, that upon this occasion GOD will open their eyes so far, as to convince a great many among them, that that cannot be the true religion which inspires men with such barbarous minds.

I have now done; and if I have been transported upon this argument somewhat beyond my usual temper, the occasion of this day, and our present circumstances will, I hope, bear me out. I have expressed myself all along with a just sense, and with no unjust severity, concerning these horrid principles and practices; but yet with great pity and tenderness towards those miserably seduced souls, who have been deluded by them, and ensnared in them. And I can truly say, as the Roman orator did of himself upon another occasion, *Me natura misericordem, patria severum, crudelem nec patria nec natura esse voluit.* My nature inclines me to be tender and compassionate; a hearty zeal for our religion, and concernment for the publick welfare of my country, may perhaps have

made

made me a little ſevere ; but neither my natural diſ- SERM. XIX.
poſition, nor the temper of the Engliſh nation, nor the genius of the proteſtant, that is, the true Chriſtian religion, will allow me to be cruel.

For the future, let us " encourage ourſelves in the " LORD our GOD ;" and commit our cauſe, and " the keeping of our ſouls to him in well doing :" And, under GOD, let us leave it to the wiſdom and care of his majeſty, and his two houſes of parliament, to make a laſting proviſion for the ſecurity of our peace and religion, againſt all the ſecret contrivances and open attempts of " theſe ſons of vio- " lence." And let us remember thoſe words of David, Pſal. xxxvii. 12, 13, 14, 15. " The wicked plot- " teth againſt the juſt, and gnaſheth upon him with " his teeth : The LORD ſhall laugh at him, for he " ſeeth that his day is coming. The wicked have " drawn out the ſword, and bent their bow, to caſt " down the poor and needy, and to ſlay ſuch as be of " upright converſation : Their ſwords ſhall enter into " their own heart, and their bows ſhall be broken."

And I hope, conſidering what GOD hath heretofore done, and hath now begun to do for us, we may take encouragement to our ſelves againſt all the enemies of our religion, which are confederated againſt us, in the words of the prophet, Iſa. viii. 9, 10. " Aſſociate yourſelves, O ye people, and ye ſhall be " broken in pieces, and give ear, all ye of far coun- " tries : gird your ſelves, and ye ſhall be broken in " pieces : gird your ſelves, and ye ſhall be broken in " pieces : take counſel together, and it ſhall come to " nought : ſpeak the word and it ſhall not ſtand. " FOR GOD IS WITH US."

And

And now what remains, but to make our moſt devout and thankful acknowledgments to almighty GOD, for the invaluable bleſſing of our reformed religion, and for the miraculous deliverance of this day, and for the wonderful diſcovery of the late horrid and barbarous conſpiracy againſt our prince, our peace, and our religion.

To him therefore, our moſt gracious and merciful GOD, our ſhield, and our rock, and our mighty deliverer: who hath brought us out of the land of Egypt, and out of the houſe of bondage; and hath ſet us free from popiſh tyranny and ſuperſtition, a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear:

Who hath, from time to time, delivered us from the bloody and mercileſs deſigns of wicked and unreaſonable men; and hath rendered all the plots and contrivances, the miſchievous counſels and devices of theſe worſe than heathens, of none effect:

Who did, as upon this day, reſcue our king and our princes, our nobles and the heads of our tribes, the governors of our church and the judges of the land, from that fearful deſtruction which was ready to have ſwallowed them up:

Who ſtill brings to light the hidden things of darkneſs, and hath hitherto preſerved our religion and civil intereſts to us, in deſpight of all the malicious and reſtleſs attempts of our adverſaries:

Unto that great GOD, who hath done ſo great things for us, and hath ſaved us by a mighty ſalvation: who hath delivered us, and doth deliver us, and, we truſt, will ſtill deliver us: be glory and honour, thankſgiving and praiſe, from generation to generation. And let all the people ſay, Amen.

A Table

A Table of the Texts of each Sermon.

SERMON I.

JOB xxviii. 28. *And unto man he said; behold! the fear of the Lord that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.* page 1

SERMON II.

2 PET. iii. 3. *Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.* p. 74

SERMON III.

PROV. xiv. 34. *Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is the reproach of any people.* p. 94

SERMON IV.

PSALM xix. 11. *And in keeping of them there is great reward.* p. 109

SERMON V.

PHIL. iii. 8. *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.* p. 128

SERMON VI.

1 JOH. v. 3. *And his commandments are not grievous.* p. 152

SERMON VII.

2 TIM. ii. 19. *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.* p. 174

SERMON VIII.

PHIL. iii. 20. *For our conversation is in heaven.* p. 194

SERMON IX.

ISA. ix. 12, 13. *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still: For the people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts.* p. 219

SERMON X.

HEB. iii. 13. *Exhort one another daily while it is called to day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* p. 237

SER-

SERMON XI.

1 COR. iii. 15. *But he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.* p. 255

SERMON XII.

PSAL. cxix. 156. *Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them,* p. 279

SERMON XIII.

PSAL. cxix. 59. *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.* p. 301

SERMON XIV.

PSAL. cxix. 60. *I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* p. 322

SERMON XV.

1 JOH. iii. 10. *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.* p. 342

SERMON XVI.

LUKE xv. 7. *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.* p. 370

SERMON XVII.

MATTH. ix. 31, 32. *Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.*

And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: But whosoever speaketh against the holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. p. 391

SERMON XVIII.

ACTS x. 38. —— *Who went about doing good.* p. 410

SERMON XIX.

LUKE ix. 55, 56. *But he turned and rebuked them, and said, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.* p. 433

The End of the first Volume.